WILD CEYLON

Describing in particular the lives of the present day Veddas

OVD

by

R. L. SPITTEL

ILLUSTRATED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

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[Title Page]

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S., Richard Lionel

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TO THE MEMORY
OF
MY FATHER
WHO TAUGHT ME TO LOVE
THE JUNGLE

[p. iii]

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1947(46&52) [illegible]

First Edition..............1924
Second Edition............1930
Third Edition..............1945

PREFACE TO THIRD EDITION

Except for a few minor alterations this work is presented in the form in which it was originally written.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THERE is little of hunting in these pages, much of the forest-folk and 121
their ways. I have purposely refrained, except in one section, from
introducing incidents of sport—of which, truth to tell, I have had small
share—into a narrative primarily designed to describe the more human
and homely aspects of jungle life, especially where as it concerns the
Veddas—the last remnant of Ceylon's aboriginal race.

Regarding the origin of the Veddas, I incline to the view that they are 174
an off-shoot of one of the wild, autochthonous tribes of India, who
crossed over to Ceylon, in prehistoric times, when the two lands were
one, and subsequently got cut off by the inroad of the sea. They appear [142]
to be very akin to the Gonds of India. Indeed, the description of a
present day Gond might just as well apply to the Vedda :—" A man of
small sturdy build, with piercing eyes and a free athletic carriage..........
axe hitched on shoulder, bow and arrows in hand ".*

I must acknowledge help I have received from many friends. Apart 000
from those to whom reference is made in foot-notes in the text I am
indebted to Mr. F. Lewis for much valuable advice in the planning of
some of our journeys ; to him and Mr. C. Drieberg I owe the botanical
names of trees. Three of the trips described here were made in the
company of Mr. Leigh Smith, to whom, I take this opportunity, of
expressing my gratitude for much valuable help in the preparation of
my manuscript for the press.

The pen and ink illustrations are by Mr. E. F. Van Dort.

R. L. SPITTEL

Colombo

[p. v]

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*" Rifle and Romance in the Indian Jungle ", by A. I. R. Glasfurd

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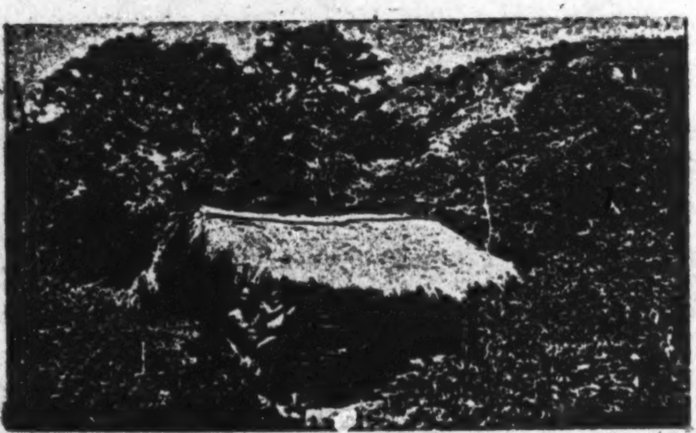

Poromola's lonely home

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Vedda bowman of Dambana

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In the dim waste lands of the Orient stands
The wreck of a race so old and vast,
That the grayest legend cannot lay hands
On a single fact of its tongueless past.

[p. xi]
[p. xii is blank]

CHAPTER I

ON A JUNGLE RIVER

1. LIFE ON THE BANKS

And every sky was blue and rain
And sudden rainbows in between,
And every bough was green again
And all the world was gilt and green.

And morning was a flaming brand,
And eve a poppy late and long,
And love-time was upon the land,
And all the world was sick for song.

We left Colombo in a burdened car which carried everything requisite— ODO food, cook, tent and camp furniture—for an outing that relied for hospitality neither on hostelry nor friend. We were free to make ourselves at home wherever and whenever we pleased and at evening we camped by the jungle road-side.

The next day found us at Trincomalee getting together provisions and arranging for two canoes to take us on a ten-day trip up the Mahaweli. These met us at Nirodumunai the following morning, with three boatmen to each canoe and an old guide—all Moors.

Rowing to the shore of Kiniyai across Tampalakaman bay, famous for window-pane oysters, we were towed some distance and landed by the ferry-house at the mouth of the Mahaweli. On the opposite bank was an encampment of fisherfolk spreading out their catch on the sand, while every now and then watchful hawks swooped down taking toll.

Before us spread the wide estuary of the inviting river, the largest in Ceylon. Its sources cradled in the amphitheatre of splendid hills in the central uplands, it descended in many a beauteous cascade through serried slopes of tea, rubber and palm; and, passing village and town that had grown on its banks, it swept through great stretches of lonely forest to disgorge its waters where we now were.

We entered the river punting along the forest border; only occasionally when crossing mid-stream was it necessary to replace pole with oar. The canoes were unsheltered; the umbrellas the boatmen provided gave poor protection against the fierce sun on the open river. Our servants made shift by heaping on their heads all the oddments of clothing they could lay hands on, and resembled piles of linen more than human beings.

Hugging the banks as we were, it was not surprising that we should have almost run into the sleeping form of a monster crocodile. We pulled up within a few feet of its nose and were wondering at its nonchalance when, with a sudden ungainly leap, it reached the water splashing us and rocking our boat. Crocodiles can evidently see with closed eyes.

Punting along the river bank. (Page 1)

Draw wells on the Mahaweli. (Page 2)

[facing p. 2]

Towards evening we came to certain gibbet-like structures which stood out against the sky in strange contrast to their surroundings. These were the draw-wells of a tobacco plantation many more of which we were to see in the course of our journey. Here our guide proposed we should pass the night; but not before he had secured for himself, as he afterwards did at every opportunity, as much tobacco as a campaign of casual, yet dignified beggary brought him.

Taking possession of one of the huts on the settlement we had emptied our boats and begun to cook when a smart shower descended to continue unceasingly throughout the night. We were in a bad way. The nine of us lay huddled in the narrow open shed at the mercy of the wind-driven rain, our nostrils worried by the narcotic odour of tobacco leaves, in all stages of desiccation, that hung from the roof like great bats.

We had but settled down when three dripping figures rushed in seeking shelter. Our boatmen facetiously remarked that they could see for themselves there was no room. But they lingered awhile enjoying the smells of our cooking and soon melted into the night to a kinder reception, we hoped, elsewhere. They were the owners of the shanty with which we had made so free!

136 It dawned superbly. The banks were covered with long lush grass that grew in a broad strip between the forest edge and the river. Spacious game trails, gashed out of the steep sides, and capable of accommodating even an elephant, led down to the water at intervals of every few yards. There was a patch of grass trodden by one of these monsters as he fed in the moon-lit rain. Even now, perhaps, he rested in the seclusion of some creeper-covered alcove at hand. Who so happy as he? Why, all:

A brace of teal flew overhead to some outlying reedy pool; a jungle cock crowed in the distance; from a swamp a cormorant cried; monkeys and large squirrels bustled in the branches; crimson-backed wood-peckers darted from tree to tree; swallows circled twittering melodiously; little birds gave music from every bough. The moan of doves, the boom of coucals, the cackle of king-fishers joined the chorus. And then, like the twang from a golden harp, the voice of the gorgeous oriole thrilled the ear.

Those notes of the jungle, so various, so apparently ill-assorted, withal so harmonious. It seemed as though Nature were but tuning her orchestra to some deep diapason of song the full development of which was not for human ears.

In the evening we found ourselves again in a ramshackle shed in a tobacco garden adjoining a rubber estate. Having bathed at a draw-well that took its water from the river, we settled to thoughts of jungle peace. The air, quick awhile with the vespers of roosting birds, was now hushed save for the trolling of a magpie-robin. Soon he too ceased. Cicadas made the forest hum. Then the night-jars, sweet harbingers of the dark, took up the song.

But what was this disquieting hum about us that momentarily grew? Mosquitoes! They assailed us in legions driving us towards the suffocating fumes of the large log fire we had built to keep off elephants. After a fidgety meal I leapt into bed, hurriedly letting down the curtain—butter-muslin no less—and, sparing a thought of commiseration for my more luckless companions, closed placid eyelids in anticipation of sleep. The servants and boatmen, covered from head to foot, crouched as close to the fire as they dared, talking amiably by way of distraction. Only

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Of no consequence except to each other (Page 5)

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Gunner's Quoin across Manampitiya tank. (Page 7)

[facing p. 3]

the seasoned old guide found heart for banter. Gradually the talk flagged, and, except for an occasional scratch, slap, or murmur, there was a tentative silence. It was not long before some one essayed a disgruntled remark to test the somnolence of the others. All the answer he got was a rough reprimand from me that he was to stop his twaddle and let others sleep. I assumed for the hundredth time a determined posture of repose; for, truth to tell, I was no better off than any one else. Suffocate myself under the sheets or rearrange my curtains as I might, I was no match for those pests. Oh that detestable hum; that jubilance with which they seared a passage into one that itched and burned for hours! Subterfuge was useless; I resorted to stoical indifference; if the tobacco-growers could stick it, I reasoned, why could not I? If tolerance could be acquired with familiarity why not at a juncture? But philosophy does not reckon with mosquitoes; and it was not long before endurance broke.

Bouncing out of bed I called to the guide and proposed we should take to the river.

" It is dangerous to do that," he said. " The elephants are in the water by now and we shall be in their midst before we know ".

" But there's the moon, we have guns, and we can row amid-stream," said I.

" It will be dark at the worst time, towards dawn," he said.

When one gets the worst of an argument thank goodness there is always recrimination as a resort. " What sort of a guide are you," I asked, " to have brought us to a place like this? "

" Had we camped elsewhere we should have fared no better," was the disarming reply.

With true humility I hastened to enquire whether we should be in similar plight every subsequent night. " Higher up," he answered consolingly " there are good places ".

I doubt whether any one of us has forgotten that night. But this I must say to the credit of those pestering demons—curtains, clothing, and even canvas were no barriers to them; their most exasperating onslaughts were from under the bed.

While it was yet dark I heard a bird of day. A crow cawed on the wing; a faint light flickered over the trees. Dawn at last; never was it more welcome.

A frowzy fellow from nowhere contemplated us as we got into the canoes.

" How can you sleep in a place like this? " I asked him with an air of contempt I felt I could now afford to assume.

" We sleep all right, " he said complacently. " We get into our houses, light a fire outside, close the doors and—there you are."

" But we did all that, " I said.

" What sort of house is that? " he answered disdainfully indicating the crumbling shack we had occupied. " Besides you were too near the jungle and not close enough to the water as you should have been. Not mosquitoes only but any animal might have come on you there. *We* slept in that hut yonder."

000 But the structure he pointed to was very unconvincing, being riddled with breaches. Familiarity not artifice, we concluded, inured the tobacco-growers of the Mahaweli; and we could not but admire a fortitude that braved annoyance so extreme and sickness so sure in the interests of a little gain.

The advice we received, however, we turned to future account; and the next night found us camped amid the trees close to the water's edge, thereby escaping mosquitoes, it is true, but not elephants; for about midnight we were awakened by the snapping of branches around us. With shouting and shooting we drove the intruders away, but not before our chauffeur, muddled with sleep and terrified out of his wits, had slipped over a rope and nearly drowned himself in the swollen river.

136 Traces of elephants were abundant everywhere. As early as four in the afternoon we would see one or more of them standing out in the tall grass by the river border plucking up great trunkfuls of the luscious food.

In the morning bird life was plentiful. Here were five pea-fowl perched on a half-immersed snag; there a lonely egret in a secluded pool. Imperial pigeons, pied horn-bills, and darters, their eel-necks inelegantly bent at bayonet-like angles, flew about in numbers. Racket-tailed drongoes and scimitar-babblers sang entrancingly; barbets contributed a monotonous refrain. White-necked storks were seated on dead trees with the abstraction of philosophers. Little munias carrying streamers of grass flew across from bank to bank. The nests of noisy bayas hung like fruit from favoured trees.

137 No less interesting were the trees that engirt us. The ubiquity of green was only occasionally relieved by some small flower of vivid hue. Many of the trees were creeper-laden and formed arbours that might have homed the troops of Pan. Great *kumbuks** bent to the water, making delightful retreats for forest-lovers. Often the river eddied round an islet formed around some stricken tree. Massive lianas, heavy as the hawsers of a Titan, swung from dizzy pinnacles holding in twisted grip the fragments of strangled saplings. Everywhere were stark dramas of vegetable life:—Tremendous trees in the grip of some epiphytic *ficus* whose tentacles guttered and clung in live pythonic cords and bands. Yet a few years and the parasite would clasp the crumbling carcase of its host and stand itself a forest monarch. Such sights are perhaps less poignant in their *denouement* than at the inception, when a slender cord, an elfin thing, streaks daintily some magnificent giant whose life, incredible as it may seem, it is destined one day surely to claim.

Nor was there lack of human interest here. A group of trees, their dome-shaped contours, suggesting at a distance masses of tree-covered rock, attracted us one noon to rest in their shade. Exotic *ingasaman* or 'rain-trees' they proved to be, sole monuments of a wasted human enterprise; not another sign was there to show that a score of years previously a young coconut plantation had struggled for existence here. Elephants had destroyed the last of the palms years ago.

000 A sylvan siesta is no smooth affair. Minute ticks swarm in the dry leaves and getting on to you bide their time. At some untoward moment, on the march perhaps or in the dead of night, an agonising pain as from the stab of a red-hot needle will tell you that Mr. Tick has begun to feed. A snake may fall on you, leap towards your face, and wriggle

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**Terminalia glabra*

away more frightened than you. A scratching noise under your pillow 000
may lead to the discovery of a scorpion or a centipede. Beetles, moths, biting ants, and insects of all descriptions investigate and experiment with you. But you soon learn to ignore these little draw-backs and drowse to the lullaby of some wood-land songster.

Tropical Nature is a stern mistress; her favours are never unalloyed. For him who would seek her she holds grievances in store, grievances that enhance the very joy they encumber; toning down ecstasy lest it pall with surfeit; giving to the contemplation of foregone experience that unfettered pleasure the reality denies, prompting us in after years to say, forgetful of all the hardships, "those were happy days we had".

The Verugal where it joined the Mahaweli was at this season an insignificant stream. Quite a colony of tobacco growers flourished here. Very picturesque are these settlements or *thelkes* as they are called. Four to six huts stand some distance apart in clearings along the bank, most of them beautifully overspread with melon-creepers. Every hut has its vegetable garden; and standing before them, like sentinels, are the draw-wells, usually in couples, that feed the tobacco plots direct from the river. The lowing of cattle under the superb trees that stud the clearing, the crowing of cocks, the sound of human voices complete the atmosphere of rural domesticity in this wild land and furnish scenes which would rejoice the heart of a painter.

Putting up one evening in a coconut grove owned by a Moor we found
an unkempt ill-clad fellow seated on his haunches staring at some simple [516]
wares a pedlar was displaying. They told us he was a Vedda from a
village some miles away. Becoming restless under our scrutiny he
walked off. I followed him to his miserable shelter, where I found his
daughter, a puny girl of four, covered with ulcers. Edging up towards
her father she stared at us distrustfully with the eyes of a startled doe. [415]
A few broken pots were their sole belongings. The bond of tender
solicitude that united these human derelicts, of no consequence except to
each other, was indeed a touching sight. I asked the man what he did [465]
for a living. He said he "earned a rupee for two months work". He
knew neither his nor his daughter's age, and when pressed for an answer [805]
said irritably, "What do I know of age? Am I a man who knows anything about age?" Blessed mortal!

We gave him a coin which he at first refused, and only accepted with
persuasion; he had evidently never handled one like it before, for he [436]
looked at it puzzled and suspicious; and when the amount it represented
was explained to him he was not enlightened.

"He knows nothing," said the Moor vociferously. "Ask him to count
six and see if he can. He's a real bull. What does he know? He's a
Vedda. For thirty-six cents he will bring a kerosene-tinful of *bambara** [435]
honey, and," he added chuckling with subtle satisfaction, "he does not
know what thirty-six cents is!"

The next day we saw in the distance the blue contours of Gunner's [133]
Quoin, the goal of our journey. The river had now become considerably
shallower with broad stretches of its sandy bed exposed. As we punted 172
along the shady border, we suddenly came upon a most realistic piece
of ancient sculpture—the life-sized head of an elephant carved out of a

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*Rock-bee, *Apis dorsata*

172 partially submerged rock. Occupying the position it did in an environment teeming with elephants it seemed designed to give a shock at first glance.

We were now in the precincts of an old civilisation. Polonnaruwa, its ruined capital, was barely ten miles away. We camped on a shoal by the water's edge. Purplish clouds retained awhile the languishing tints of a fast paling sky. Near us was an islet, forest-engloomed and haunted, they said, by tutelary demons. In bygone days these forests were peopled. All was now still save for the plaint of a sand-piper. A buffalo coming to drink stood irresolute awhile watching our fires, then melted into the gloom. A scarcely distinguishable flock of cormorants flew overhead. From afar came the eerie cry of a devil bird.

2. VEDDAS OF GUNNER'S QUOIN

THE ferry at Periathurai marked the end of our river journey. Some 131
miles inland was the rock called Gunner's Quoin round which Veddas lived.

Under a bo-tree by the river was an image of Ganesha the pot bellied, elephant-headed Hindoo god with offerings of withered lotus flowers before him. In a temple hard by, were massive bells and drums that kept deafening accompaniment on many a ceremonial day when peacock-plumed men, in the self-imposed torture of skewered cheek and pronged back, bounded hither and thither in delirious dance; and here were the implements, prongs and tridents, these frenzied devotees had dedicated to their unhearing god.

At the Tamil village of Manampitiya we were regaled with an old man's 114
tales of the Veddas. He told us of one Patabanda only recently dead,
called *walige**-Patabanda owing to his habit of wearing his loin cloth 173
long behind. It appeared this Vedda was a fine marksman. A *rata-mahatmaya*† once wishing to test his skill pointed to a small jak fruit on a tall tree and asked him to shoot. The arrow flew true and stuck in the fruit; whereupon the Vedda feigning anger said roughly, "Now give me my arrow; it was you who asked me to shoot". The timid chief proffered money which was disdainfully refused. The Vedda then taking another arrow hit the stem of the fruit so that it fell and enabled him to recover both arrow and fruit. Thus do men pass into fable.

We were told many another tale of Veddas and their ways, and of matters connected with the ancient ruins to be found on the rock; of an anchorite who had lived in a cave there unharmed by the bears; and of ancient Vedda kings captured by stratagem and fraud.

A walk of five miles the next morning brought us to the foot of Gunner's 114
Quoin. I was now brimming with expectancy; for I was about to see for the first time the Veddas in their homes; that aboriginal people who had time and again attracted the scholars of Europe, and in whose veins flowed the oldest blood of the inhabitants of Ceylon. They were here when Wijeya came from India in 543 B.C. and founded the Sinhalese dynasty; long earlier, when that Buddha came who preached to his followers at Mahiyangana after having put to flight the Yakkhas (Veddas?); to an even still older beginning their ancestry went, to a time in the stone age when man vied for existence with prehistoric forms.

To-day hardly a Vedda true to the old traditions survives; not one 144
that uses beaten bark for apparel, or depends for sustenance solely on the 178
jungle. The inroads of civilisation and the effects of miscegenation with the neighbouring Sinhalese or Tamils are tending surely towards the extinction of the race. Yet, for all that, many of the old Vedda traits still survive in their degenerate descendants and these are still a link with an unfathomable past.

---

*Tail †Kandyan chief

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A Vedda home of the Ulpotta. (Page 8)

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Veddas at Gunner's Quoin. The two to the left (Vela and Sinna) are the most typical. (Page 8)

[facing p.8]

123 We had hardly gained the base of the rock when we heard human
voices and soon came up with three men and their dogs. One fellow
[411 carried a gun, the others had axes hitched to their shoulders. They
412] were on their way to a devil dancing ceremony at a house of illness some
miles away; but abandoning their project they accompanied us to their
homes.

621 In a small clearing stood half a dozen leafy shelters. Outside one of
these, three women with infants at the breast were seated roasting small
[342] yellow flowers. The rest of their people were at work on a *chena** close
[162] by. We summoned them and soon we had all the Veddas of the *Kosgaha
Ulpotta* before us—some six or eight men and about a dozen women and
[164] children. They were a poor lot bearing the stigmata of malaria and
[146] framboesia. There was but one old man among them. The children
were emaciated and languid.

144 Most of them showed strong traces of Tamil admixture, especially
the women; what poor ornaments they wore, their clothing, and even
177 their very names were Tamil; and so were their predilections if the
coy smiles one or two of them bestowed on the fine Tamil that accompanied
us signified anything. There were at least three men, however, true to
142 Vedda type—short of stature, wild-eyed, with beardless face and upstanding frizzly hair.

411 They had no bows among them, except as playthings for the children,
524 but made us one as a memento and stained it with charcoal and
thimbiri to give it the appearance of use.

342 The huts were fashioned of wattle and leaves, and thatched with dry
415 grass. Their domestic appointments comprised earthen pots, a wooden
pestle and mortar, bark rope, and a deer skin or two.

262 Fruits, flowers, wild yams, honey, the flesh of animals, *kurrukkan*†
and maize formed their food. The meat they fancied most was that of
224 the langur and monitor lizard which they hunted with the lazy mongrels
231 that loitered about. They eat abundantly and at any hour when food
264 is plentiful; but as a rule one good meal a day is all they expect; in
times of dearth they bear hunger stoically, chewing incessantly a few
261
415 varieties of bark they carry in pouches fashioned of cloth saturated with
melted wax (*itee relhee*). Partial nomads, they spend many months
221 of the year under trees and in caves. Where the *palu*, *weera*, *kong*, or
222 *mora*‡ fruit is ripe, where the hives are, there they take their women and
children, dogs, and chattels and go.

515 "How often do you bathe?" I asked one of them, the smell of their
ring-wormed bodies suggesting little acquaintance with water.

"What bathing for us," he replied. "We fall into a stream once in a way and get out again; that is our bath. And we only do that when our stomachs are full. When we are hungry we don't care for anything; we can eat even a man then!"

904 In answer to the question how they measured distances and what
constituted a mile, the reply was, "We walk till our legs hurt, then we
[276] place our axes on the ground, sit down, take out our pouches, and chew
a quid; that is our mile".

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*A patch of forest cleared for cultivation

[137] †*Eleusine coracana*

‡*Mimusops hexandra, Hemicyclia sepiaria, Schleichera trijuga, Nephelium longana,* respectively.

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"Their homes, the shelter of the trees." (Page 9)

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Kaida and his family. (Page 9)

[Facing p. 9]

Vela was an interesting little chap and, unlike the others, had always [157]
something to say for himself. He entertained us with charms, pleasing 776
lullabies, and songs of rock and stream demons that came as fast as
as leaves shaken by the wind, in the guise of bears, their mouths adrip
with human blood. These he sang despite warnings from the others [825]
who reminded him that he had sucked a chicken bone, which was a
dangerous thing to do before invoking devils lest it invite their anger.

Coming to a pool, brown with decaying leaves, we asked if the water 312
was good. "Very good," said a Vedda, adding the epicurean touch,
"Those fallen flowers floating there make the water sweet; they are the
flowers that give good honey."

It was high noon when Veddas left us to go in search of food. But 186
Vela lingered to tell us of the oppression of the local headman. Did
they but catch a young deer or pea-chick that came their way they were
prosecuted. The visiting apothecary too was bad; he gave them no
medicines except for gifts of honey or meat; and the poor fellows had
little enough for themselves.

Having visited a cave containing the battered remains of an old 621
Buddha, we continued our circuit of the rock; and after a walk of an 342
hour and a half under a burning sky, came to the Veddas of the *Kudda
Ulpotha*. These had no huts of any sort, but merely sat grouped in
families under various trees. It was the season of the *kong* fruit, of 222
which there was plenty about. Women were boiling down the luscious 252
pulp with which to make cakes, or extracting from the seeds an oil 757
said to be good for sores and wounds. Very fond of the fruit they all 262
were; it had been their only sustenance for days. One little urchin,
his mouth be-ringed with parangi ulcers, was licking clean a coconut 164
shell containing the acrid juice, with a relish worthy of a tastier dish.

The patriarch of the settlement, Naida, and his wife were typical [622]
Veddas; but here again most of the others showed Tamil admixture.
One man had a large scar across his face. The manner he came by it 222
illustrates well the aggressiveness of the little Ceylon sloth-bear. When
out collecting honey he saw a she-bear and her cub. Realizing the
certain disaster of such an encounter he cautiously climbed a tree; but [481]
in doing so snapped a twig and gave himself away. With a series of
blood-curdling cries she charged him, and clambering up the tree, bit
and clawed him severely. A large flap was torn from his face. This [757]
his father sewed up with a thorn and fibre, and doctored with a result
that might have done credit to any surgeon. Living as they invariably
do in the neighbourhood of rocks, and having kindred tastes in honey,
yams, and fruit, the Veddas and bears often encounter each other, as
the ugly scars on many of the men testify.

As, footsore and tired, we rounded the southern end of the rock towards 222
evening, we met parties of Veddas returning with basketfuls of *kong*
fruit. One youth was up a tree making the jungle ring to his song as
he beat down the berries. As it darkened we reached Manampitiya,
but not before we had worried a blind old owl that had descended to a
streamlet to quench its thirst.

It is hard to forget that first experience of the Veddas in their homes: 000
those voices in the jungle, that sight of their huts among the trees, and of
their women roasting dainty little flowers for food.

000 The next noon we were on the river making easy passage with the current all in our favour, and travelling at ten times the speed we had laboured up. The boatmen who had spent the night on the bank looked as if they were afflicted with measles, so remorselessly had the mosquitoes handled them; and already one of them was shivering with malaria.

The heat of noon on the river was intense; and the splash of the oars or the sight of boys bathing at the draw-wells gave little appeasement. No bird had the heart to sing. As we passed, king-fishers flashed out of their cool retreats, coveys of stove-curlew ran up the shoals, and submerged wild buffaloes floundered up the bank. Clusters of yellow butterflies sipped moisture from the wet sand. A brahminy kite, its feet immersed in the shallows, whistled a warning to its mate that answered from afar.

621 At Kandakadu, where we met the first Vedda and his child, we spent the night; and, having two hours daylight to spare, decided to visit his village, in spite of being advised against it at that hour, as elephants were plentiful. The place was disappointing as regards Veddas; for, [342] instead of the crude huts we hoped to see, we found well built houses with cattle and fowls in plenty; and the inhabitants, though they called themselves Vedda, were Tamils to all appearance. Nevertheless, we 136 saw here a sight we would not have missed. In a field in full view of the village, and bordering a pool where women went for water, were three elephants belly-deep in the tall grass feeding with the indifference of cattle. The forest between this village and the river veritably teemed with traces of elephants.

000 At the Verugal junction we were greeted by a fine old Arab in baggy breeches and skull-cap. His house, a stout three-storied structure, was designed to stand the stress of floods. When the lower floors were submerged he would remain islanded on the upper which had mud floors to permit of cooking. On the rich silt left in his garden when the waters ebbed, he planted tobacco and the luxuriant vegetables he was now selling our boatmen. A stern man was Mohamed Sultan as he was called. When one of our party cut more sugar-cane than he intended taking, he was brought to his senses quickly enough with a single sentence. The aggrieved one afterwards confided to me that Mohamed was once a notorious robber of Kiniyai where he lived killing and eating other people's cattle!

We rapidly drifted toward the end of our journey, having done in a day and half downstream what we had taken seven days upstream to accomplish. As we reached the river-mouth the mosquito hosts were abroad, a storm threatened, but the fishers of the estuary were unconcernedly hauling their nets to a song.

CHAPTER II

THE VEDDAS OF HENEBEDDE

1. NUWARAGALA AND BEYOND

Talk not of temples, there is one
Built without hands, to mankind given ;
Its lamps are the meridian sun
And all the stars of heaven,
Its walls are the cerulean sky,
Its floor the earth so green and fair,
The dome its vast immensity ;
All Nature worships there.
VEDDER

FOR months we had nursed the prospect of a ramble in the Vedda country. 114 Professor Seligmann, writing some nine years previously of the parts we hoped to visit, had said :

> "We met with only four families who still led the life described by Bailey in 1863, and these were not among the Nilgalla but among the Nuwaragala hills......After visiting so many decaying or degenerate communities a refreshing state of affairs was found at Sittala Wanniya. Here there were at least four families who were living the life their forefathers had lived for generations without perceptible change. They still found game, honey and yams in quantities sufficient not only to support life, but to have a surplus to barter with the Moormen or to take into the nearest Sinhalese village to exchange for iron, pots and occasional rice and coconuts."*

Thus it was that the Nuwaragala and Sittala Wanniya terrain came to be the object of our search. But reaching Maha Oya we received a rude awakening at the outset. We were questioning our guides regarding the route when to our surprise they told us that no Veddas now remained in Sittala Wanniya ; that some few who had been at Galmede had either [131] died or gone eastward : and that, not certainly for two generations had Veddas been known to inhabit the Nuwaragala caves. To see Veddas, they said, we would have to go to Henebedde and Danigala, places within easier access of Bibile farther south. We had no choice but to change our plans and commit ourselves to the larger undertaking of working down through Henebedde to the high road at Bibile, after a journey of some sixty miles through the forest.

The jungle is as a home to some ; they are never so happy as when they 660 are amidst its delight and mystery. The bird songs, the sun glimmering

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*The Veddas by C. G. and B. Z. Seligman [p. 11]

000 through faery arbours, the embosoming trees, and they feel wrapped in homely influences. But with my companion it was otherwise. Recently out from England he was not bred to conditions such as these. When I bade him give ear to the song of the grackle and the chattering of parrots, and indicated the glossy drongoes on the charred tree-skeletons of sunnied *chenas*, he shared none of my enthusiasm; to him the sounds and sights were strange. He bethought him, "The melodies of my beechen groves, are they here, or the joy of my breezy rolling downs?" Fostered in ampler horizons, his yearnings were for vistas beyond the thronging trees.

Six miles of dark, virginal forest separated the hamlet of Pollebedde on the banks of the Rambukkan from the hill of Nuwaragala which, though out of our way, possessed features of sufficient interest to decoy us. Though the sun was at its worst we walked in the cool shade. Sparse shafts of light penetrated the strata of leaf overhead, working with subtle artistry on the russet carpet of fallen foliage intricate and chance designs, where the spur-fowl scratched for food, and the resting sambur wagged a languid ear. By many a runnel was the spoor of leopard, and deep holes exposing lacerated roots testified to the foraging of a boar or bear. A melodious cry of pain told of a jungle tragedy, some little bird in the talons of a hawk.

As we neared the hidden rock large blocks of granite were frequently seen and we had begun to realise that we were making a gradual ascent, when our guide, pointing to a more or less orderly arrangement of stones, said, "That is the old-time road".

We proceeded up this buttressed way, wide enough in its time to have allowed six men to walk abreast. It wound along the face of the hill, and then, turning sharply on itself, led upwards again. Between the roadway and the rock was what seemed a shallow moat; and here, leaning as if for support against a great boulder, was a sight that gave us pause—an old jak tree; a mere shell of a tree, tattered, creviced, and sparse of leaf; to it clung one puny fruit, the ill-nourished offspring of its withered age. This symbol of human occupation was a living link that connected us with the ancient people of the rock.

Higher up, the stone was grooved with steps apparently designed to short-circuit the doubled way. The ranged boulders now gave place to a rocky outcrop socketed and grooved for the stanchions of some structure, a block-house perhaps, in the event of assault. Here were the scattered bones of a boar ambushed and eaten by a leopard lurking in a rift: The clatter of nearing hoofs; tautened thews and a swinging tail: a lightning leap, a snarl, and a fell to-do: the splash and trickle of gore, the glutted feast, and the return to the putrid fragments till every bone was clean. The drama was complete.

Traces of animals were plentiful all the way up the rock, even of elephants; how these could clamber here, was a wonder, and why, a mystery. Was there not sufficient food in the lower forests that they must take this arduous way? For even we were short-breathed and weary-kneed as we laboured up and up along a path that became rougher, steeper, and narrower with every step. A welcome breeze told us we were nearing the top; and though the path still wound between boulders and trees the going was easier. At length we were on the summit;

there far below us stretched an unbroken panorama of sky and hilled horizon. And lo! at our feet was the solution of the enigma as to what had attracted the elephants to this eminence of over a thousand feet—a placid pool. Here the forest lords had come in the parched July nights when the lower streams were waterless.

Closer observation revealed that here was a great cistern (*pokuna*)* cut out of the living rock by human hands; one of the finest examples of stone carving in Ceylon. From this the hill sloped upwards to a wooded terrace studded with the ruins of a massive stone building, probably a fortress as strong as it was difficult of access.

We spent the night on the summit. Around us rose the bastions of encircling hills clothed in forest which concealed a vast wealth of animal life; beyond these was a second range; and behind them a third; and so range beyond range, until finally fuliginous contours billowed against a crimson sky seeming to belong more to cloud-land than to earth. The sunset flared like a beacon scattering smoky flocculi. The dark crept to the whispering of cool night winds, the gemmed sky canopied the sleep of those solitudes, and the cold and comfortless moon looked down. Into our hearts crept a quiet, old as earth.

The cry of a leopard challenged the dawn resonant with the twittering of waking birds. We had left for the morning the investigation of another feature the hill possessed. By way of a ledge on the western face we gained a spacious cavern overlooking a sheer drop of perhaps eight hundred feet. Drip-ledges ran in three parallel rows along the brow of the cave which was engraved with an ancient inscription telling of "Mahatissa beloved of the gods." Shallow grooves and sockets at the lip of the cave marked the foundations of a former enclosing wall.

Interesting as was the cave in itself we had but to turn towards the vast scene it overlooked to be greeted, from the sunnied slopes and dells below, by peal upon peal from the silver throats of spur-fowl; as the notes of one rising in staccato scale began to decline, another took on the swell in a cannon of music. It was a paen proportioned to the noble amphitheatre in which it was set, a hymn to the rising day. These sounds greeted us now in this derelict land of the Veddas. Such songs those men, captains and kings perchance, had heard in an older day, when, on such a dawn as this, they strained hand-sheltered eyes in gaze across the forest watchful of advancing foes.

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*It measures some 77 feet by 58 and about 5 feet deep.

Regarding Nuwaragala, Mr. Frederick Lewis, to whom I believe belongs the credit of first having called attention to the rock, says:—

"Nowhere did I see traces of Buddhistic import; the place looked grimly fortification-like. The commanding position, the solidity of structure, the natural difficulties of approach, combined with the elaborate design for the conservation of water supply, leave a convincing impression that this could be no place of pious retreat only. The water-supply would probably serve a thousand people. This could hardly be necessary for a handful of priests; especially when Nature had planted a fort that could guard a great arterial path (the old military road from Tissamaharama to Pollanaruwa by way of Kalloda) creeping along the outskirts of a probably unsubdued country, that at that time was possibly inhabited by the *yakkus* or Veddas that the Sinhalese never really subdued.

The ubiquity of Buddhist monasteries in remote rocks similar to Nuwaragala must, however, make us accept such a theory with reserve, until further evidence is forthcoming.

115 173 439 On our return journey, passing the ruins of a remarkable aqueduct of stone—the Watawala Kandiya—beside the remains of a crumbling bund, we arrived at Kurunduwina where we met a doddering ancient who claimed to have been alive when the British took Ceylon a hundred years ago. It is not often one meets old folk in these unhealthy lands. Here, I thought, was one who could tell us something about Veddas of a type we could not hope to see; for within view of his hut were the Sittala Wanniya hills, the immemorial homes of the Veddas. But his decrepit mind needed much jogging.

"Are there Veddas here?" I shouted twice into his deaf old ears.

"Now none," he said.

"Did they live on the rocks yonder?" I asked. He nodded affirmatively.

"Did they come here to barter?" I persisted. His tired lack-lustre eyes flashed to a memory as he answered with surprising alacrity, "Yes they came. When they had no food they came to exchange honey and hides for food. The Vedda would sit there, place his bow there, his arrows there, and his axe there, and he would ask for betel. If any one stepped over his weapons by chance, he would leap up in anger, bite the piece of human liver he carried in his betel-bag, and ask, 'Who's this that dares to defy me?' The gleam faded from the old man's eye, his weary look returned and he uttered not another word, question as I might.

The shifting *chenas* scattered about these parts make it very difficult to say where a village begins or ends. We were resting on the banks of the Rambukkan, (a course parallel to which we had so far followed) somewhere on the confines of Payile and Idambowa, when to our surprise we saw a Buddhist priest accompanied by the inevitable *abithaya** and a tall, wild, naked fellow. A Vedda of Bingoda the latter was said to be. [609] We tried to engage him in talk, but he would have none of it; seated on his haunches he stared at us with a hang-dog apathy eloquent of hunger; this melted away in a broad grin as he left us, greedily chewing the handful of muscatels and biscuits we gave him.

The usual route from here to Potuliyadda lay through the village of Mullagama. As this involved a detour we decided on a more direct if less used track; a decision we afterwards regretted as it lost us the interesting Veddas of Bingoda, and incidentally a clue to the discrepancy between Seligmann's statement and local report regarding the Veddas of the "Nuwaragala hills"—a missed opportunity the full significance of which we were only to realise some five years later after miles of [621] arduous and unnecessary travel. For the present we were told that the Veddas of Bingoda consisted of only three families, and that, though they forsook their huts for caves during the honey season, they were, if anything, less of the real Vedda than those of Henebedde.

Our journey was now an uncertainty; for the guides were doubtful both of the route and the likelihood of water. The jungle, hitherto dense, gave place to an occasional glade. Late in the evening we found ourselves in a spacious *talawa*, rank with tall grass that quite obliterated our path. Here we were benighted, just as we found a pool adequate to our needs. It was an interesting place, a veritable sanctuary, hill-encircled; an ideal

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*A neophyte, attendant on a priest.

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site for a guarded city. Indeed its entire aspect savoured of such a possibility, with its large granite slabs and disordered pilasters, cairns like crumbling *viharas*,* and clumps of bamboo suggestive of former human occupation. But local tradition gave no colour to our surmise, nor had we the time for a careful scrutiny. If this was no work of man, then Nature must be credited with an amazing piece of artistic mimicry.

Finding a way out of the glade the following morning, we struck a widening path which brought us to a crossing of ways where we found, built into a triple-stemmed tree, a small platform covered with fresh leaves.

"This is a thing the Veddas have done," said our guide, as he saw us puzzling over it.

Our hearts leaped ! for we were now in the precincts of the Henebedde Veddas, and what more fitting introduction to them than an altar built to forest gods by men perhaps even now on the trail. We learnt later that this was none of the Veddas' doing but the *gamarala's*,† and was intended to contain a coconut as refreshment for the *ratamahatmaya* he hourly expected ; a circumstance to which we also owed the gala trick-out of the shed we were soon to occupy.

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*Sacred domes of masonry.

†Minor headman.

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[facing p. 16]

Handuna strings his bow (Page 16)

The best of the Hennebeddè Veddas.—Poromola and Handuna (Page 16)

2. FOREST CHILDREN

621 THE village of Potuliyadda lies in the heart of the country of the Henebedde Veddas. We had hoped to take these people unawares in their homes some three miles away; but it was not to be; for a Vedda boy who had witnessed our arrival had forestalled us.

We were at lunch, when my friend, whose seat commanded a view of the jungle, quietly remarked, "Hullo; who are these? Veddas without a doubt."

Five men, armed with bows, arrows and axes, strode in single file
142 under the leadership of a small one-eyed man, half of whose face was
157 covered by an awful scar which puckered an eyeless socket, giving a
[411] touch of pathos to an otherwise harsh expression. Such was Poromola,
[622] chief of the Henebedde Veddas also called *Walaha* (bear) for obvious
reasons. Then there was Handuna a fine type of wild man; though
close on fifty his figure was well-knit, and this combined with his goatee
beard and tousy head gave a strength and rugged dignity to his bearing.
There were also a tall bearded man of forty, loquacious and sophisticated
enough when you knew him; a lanky, slouching, beady-eyed fellow; a
robust, curly-haired bumpkin; and lastly, the snub-nosed little mischief-maker to whom we owed the honour of this visit.

As the Veddas came up to us, they uttered some fierce jargon we did
123 not understand. It was pretty obvious they were acting; and not
caring to encourage them in this, I casually motioned them away. They retired mumbling. We recalled them later to find them in dudgeon, evidently not being used to such treatment. They stared mutely at us affecting not to understand a word of the Sinhalese in which I addressed them. I tried again and again, but not by the flicker of an eyelid did they signify comprehension. Civility and persuasion having failed, I tried the effect of candour, telling them that we were not gullible strangers and knew all about them. This also was without effect.

Opening Seligmann's book, which contained the portraits of these very Veddas taken ten years previously, we suited picture to prototype. They gazed uncritically with stolid intentness showing no surprise or enthusiasm. I asked them whether they remembered the author and his wife who had spent so much time with them and been so kind to them. One nodded, and the others' faces betrayed interest. Thus was the first barrier carried.

Gradually we won them over one by one; but despite our best efforts the conversation flagged. And we, tired of making all the advances simulated an indifference we far from felt, and took to our books.

"We are hungry," said Handuna after a while. "Will you not give us food?"

We could only offer them money, an almost useless thing to the Veddas. We had made the serious mistake of coming unprovided with a surplus of rice, betel, arecanut and tobacco; for the surest way to the heart of the Vedda is through his stomach. We

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Handuna's household. (Page 18)

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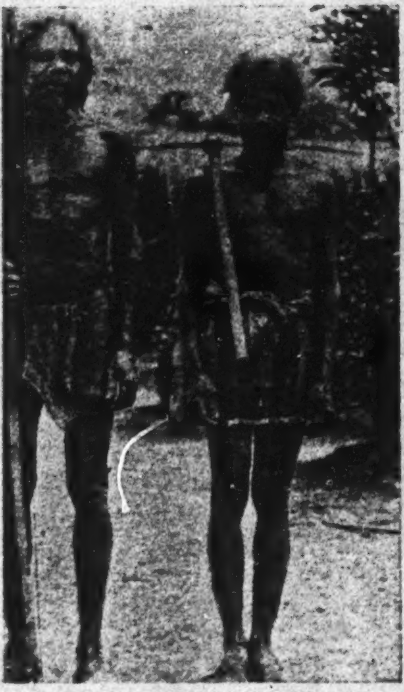

Hennebedde Veddas (Page 26)

The iguana hunter. (Page 17)

[facing p. 17]

were loath to purchase their intimacy with gifts. Time enough 123 for that, when we had won them over by less humiliating means. Besides, these Veddas were evidently spoilt, and we wished to show them they were not the important personages they imagined themselves to be.

"We are going then," said Handuna. It was now our turn for dejection. Was it for such an ungracious issue we had travelled so far?

I had a last card, having brought some neosalvarsan, a sovereign remedy for yaws so rife among these people. The offer was received [164] with indifference. There was only one case among them, they said, and the patient was too ill to come. This being just what we wanted, I offered to visit them the next morning.

"You cannot come where we live unless we allow you," said the irrepressible Kaira. "And we won't show you our caves or anything, unless *you* give us presents."

Sick with exasperation and disgust at the behaviour of these impossible children, I told them they could take our offer or leave it as they chose, and turned to other work. The result was a grudging acquiescence; and, leaving a guide behind, they went away.

A word of explanation regarding the sophistication of a people so remote. 156 They were in fact about the purest-blooded Veddas extant; indeed, it was to this very circumstance they owed their disappointing behaviour; 114 for it had attracted Seligamann among them. What that implied may well be imagined. To obtain the valuable sociological information with which his book abounds, he had gained the confidence of these folk with scrupulous consideration and kindness, showering on them gifts of all kinds. Moreover, the patient investigation of the most intimate details of their lives by such a man, heightened their self-esteem. Of this we had an amusing illustration. I was obliged to admonish a group of Sinhalese that embarrassed us with their attentions. A Vedda sidled up and, tapping me familiarly on the shoulder, whispered, "Those [186] people don't like us, they are jealous of us. We and you gentlemen are one; they are different!"

To dismiss these Veddas as spoilt uninteresting folk would imply failure to discern their innate simplicity, beneath the veneer of pose and importunity, for which contact with an indulgent stranger had been responsible. In their homes they still are as artless as their forbears were before ever white man set foot on these shores.

We were out hunting early that afternoon, when a sudden snapping 224 sound arrested our attention. The Vedda we were with listened a few 231 seconds. "Catching *talagoyas*," (monitor-lizards), he said laconically. The excited barking of a dog and rebuking human voices soon confirmed his conjecture. Going up, we found two men, one of whom carried a large quivering monitor just killed; while two dogs, still spirited with the chase, danced round their victim and growled and snapped at us. One of the men now set about to disjoint the quarry's tail at the middle, leaving it connected only by a tag of sinew; then, slitting the submandibular web, he rove the tail through till it locked at the division, making the reptile eat its own tail as it were, and carried it neatly in a loop. The monitor is best hunted at high noon; after four in the afternoon it takes to trees and holes.

136 The grass in the glades was so tall that it covered us entirely. One's only chance of encountering game lay at the forest margins, or in the infrequent patches of burnt ground, overspread with the tender spicous shoots of which the chital are fond. Parrots and doves broke the stillness of the evening with their crooning. Startled quails whirred from our feet crying vociferous caution to their crouching young, and sometimes we would flush a *pathan kukula*, a species of partridge. But the note that accorded most with the brooding genius of the place, was the mournful, incessant 'ho-ho, ho-ho' of the *botua-kapan*, a cuckoo which, try as we might, we failed to see.

The next morning, provided with a small langur we shot on the way,
361 we visited the Henebedde Veddas in their homes. Handuna's hut
231 stood at the foot of a densely wooded hill. There were a few cattle about
which the Veddas tended for a consideration from the Sinhalese; and,
what was even more unexpected, we found here a couple of hens with
excellent broods; for, even the Sinhalese of these parts, as we learnt to
our cost, kept no fowls. In these pursuits lie the nuclei that bid fair
to tie nomadic hunters to fixed abodes.

Handuna's hut was a long low structure of wattle and bast thatched
342 with straw, and partitioned into three or four dark rooms, occupied by
[281 his family and those of his sons-in-law. At one end of the building was an
362] open living-room in which we were entertained with deer skins for seats.
Slung from the eaves, at the other end of the hut, was a gourd, the mouth
231 of which was plugged with wax pierced with two small holes, through
which bees busily entered and emerged. As I focussed my camera on
this interesting example of Vedda apiculture, the enterprising showman
naively remarked that a gentleman had once given him a rupee for that
picture; but he might have spared the hint for the good it brought him.

343 Standing a little apart from the main hut, was a squat, kennel-like
structure for the segregation of women, during their monthly indisposition.
[841] This feature is universal among jungle folk, whether Vedda,
[171] half-Vedda, Sinhalese, or Tamil. These sheds, barely sufficient for an
individual to sit or lie crouched in, are often overgrown by jungle, and
only crudely protected with bark-slats or deer skins; they have a fire-place
at the open entrance; sometimes they are more hygienically built
over trestles. Considering the poor protection they afford, and their
nearness to the forest around, it must require some fortitude on the
part of those occupying them, especially at night.

252 We now saw the monkey we had brought prepared for food. A slow
fire was kindled in the garden; on this the carcase was placed, and turned
over until well singed, emitting a most appetising odour. The smooth
stone on which Handuna had up to now been seated, and which did
service as seat or platter as occasion demanded, was requisitioned; the
half-roasted animal was placed on it, disemboweled, and quartered with
the blade of an arrow. A dog, that had been awaiting the opportunity,
feasted on the offal in full view. The head was severed and split in half,
[824 the limbs, dismembered, and the trunk broken flat. The various fragments
264] were then put back to roast. When all was ready, dainty morsels
were served out to us on broad *kenda** leaves (the usual plates of these
262 people), with the polite request that we must eat first. A fragment of
liver done to a turn, and a dainty hand with the charred little fingers

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**Macaranga tomentosa.*

turned in like a child's, fell to my share. I was contemplating the 262
proposition with disgust, when, to my surprise, I saw my companion
bravely tackling his; he recommended the meat as savoury. Not to be
outdone, I gingerly followed his example, remembering that the nearer
the bone the cleaner the flesh. While our chauffeur not only refused his
share, but turned away with green-visaged disgust at the behaviour
of his masters. The Veddas meanwhile applied themselves heartily to
the meal, crunching hungrily bones and all; the brain and liver they
regarded as special delicacies.

Our next course was a fragment of *kurrakkan* cake garnished with a
pungent *sambol*; this was a more feasible dish—but for the sand one
crunched with every bite. A handful of honey-comb brought the dreadful
meal to a welcome close. It did not occur to our hosts that water for 515
cleansing would be acceptable; a procedure they ignored, wiping their
hands instead on the posts of the hut, their own bodies, or filthy loin-rags.
The chatty in which they brought us water could no more stand on its
base than an egg.

So far we had seen none of their women, but had heard subdued female 123
voices in the adjoining room, and surprised the glint of dark inquisitive
eyes between the bark-slats. It required no little persuasion to bring
them out. Even to pose for their portraits these people wanted presents!
There was not a woman among them who had the remotest pretensions
to comeliness; what little of it they might possess, their graceless rags
disguised.

About a half-mile from Handuna's hut were the dwellings of the 361
one-eyed Poromola and the sophisticated Kaira. We found the former
disconsolately seated in his airy shed, with a little child on his lap, no
less wistful than its grandsire. Patiently they awaited the return of 464
the old man's wife and daughter, with the handful of grain they would 465
earn for the day by working on a *chena*.

We secured some bows and arrows of fine workmanship here, and an 411
aude which we mistook for a large arrow-head; but Kaira taking it said,
"This is what we dance with," and suiting the action to the word, 535
twirled the implement, tang and point, between his fingers, or shouldered
it gun-wise, while he performed the shuffling semi-circular movements of
a Vedda dance.

Thus ended our visit to Henebedde. That night, as we lay in bed, we 241
heard a Vedda stave shouted lustily into the dark. It came from the
watcher of a neighbouring field on his lonely look-out, and served as a 533
variant to the "hoos" with which he kept away foraging animals.
The refrain, *Ma mini, ma mini, ma deyya*, (Oh ! great man, oh ! great man,
oh ! great God) told of soul-hunger even in a people so primitive. We
took it for a token of hail and farewell from the land of the Veddas.

Embillene's only claim to a name lay in the open *ambalam* (travellers' 600
lodge), built high on strong posts that elephants might pass through
without being tempted to destroy it. Here we found a team of pack-
bulls and their drovers. The head of the *tavalam** was a loquacious
fellow who took the whole forest into his confidence. People as a rule
talk quietly in the jungle, subconsciously respecting, as it were, its
solemnity; not so these drovers; their discourse is high-pitched, from

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*Team of pack bulls.

600 habit acquired as much through the necessity of directing their teams as from their solicitude to warn off wild beasts. The chief of the gang, as we said, was garrulous. His proclivity for vagrancy sustained a religious fervour, which betrayed itself in the incessant punctuations of his eloquence with such phrases, as "By the grace of Buddha," "If God wills," etc. With his future life he took no risks; for there was not a shrine in two provinces, Buddhistic or Hindoo, he had not visited. He shouldered his pingo impatient of departure, but lingered to honour us with a ingratiating glance; interpreting it rightly I gave him a pittance; but the same look bestowed on my friend (who had no sympathy for even amusing humbugs) was only wasted. He left us with his uproariousness ringing in our ears, and the regret, in my heart at least, that I was not of his company.

177 [131] The Danigalla Veddas were within easy reach of us at Nilgalla, the picturesque frontier of the Vedda country. But, so soon after our experience with the Henebedde Veddas, we were in no mood to repeat all over again the tedious palaver that contact with them would mean. For generations the classic show-Veddas of Ceylon, within easy reach of the Bibile resthouse on the high road, they and their ancestors had often been summoned to satisfy the thirst of scientists, or the curiosity of casual visitors. On such occasions they would appear clad in the scantiest rags, equipped with bows and arrows they seldom used, and, feigning ignorance of Sinhalese, would assume that moroseness and ferocity of expression they knew to be expected of them. What wonder then, that some of the impressions carried away, gave as true a picture of the real Vedda, as a performing animal of his wild brother?

One of the younger Veddas had accompanied us all the way from Henebedde to Bibile. He had been unfortunate enough to sell our cook some bear's grease and leopard oil; and no change being available in the jungle, he had no alternative but to accompany us some twenty-five miles, burdened into the bargain with a forty-pound tent! The look of blank wonderment he bestowed on the miracle of a moving automobile is a memory difficult to efface.

[pp. 21-33 include no information on the Vedda. -Analyst]

[pp. 21-33 not processed]

CHAPTER IV

VILLAGE VEDDAS AND JUNGLE SHRINES

And here were forests ancient as the hills
Enclosing sunny spots of greenery

COLERIDGE

1. THE EMBRACE OF THE TREES

13 131 361 **Buried** in the jungle ten miles north-west of Maha Oya lies the old Vedda village of Omuna. Forest, unbroken by the meanest glade, intervenes between. At a pool we flush a brace of bronze-winged pigeons or set a-chirruping a covey of small birds; while every now and then the scurry of unseen feet tells that the woods are live with game. Jungles darken early; by five-thirty a cathedral gloom creeps to the songs of roosting birds: the shama throats a rambling lay, the grubbing pitta sounds a shrill call, the cuckoo wakes, like a curfew, the forest echoes, " while like a long-roll drummer the night-jar thrills the treen."

It is all but dark when, through a break in the trees, the hill of Omuna stands before us; and the clamour of resenting dogs and a welcoming fire tell us we have reached the limit of an arduous walk.

13 823 Where the Vedda is, there is the inevitable rock. The tie between them is intimate. To the life, animal and tree, on the timbered sides of the hill the Vedda is beholden for sustenance. The boulder-bound stream gives him water, and there lurk demons watchful for his undoing, and tutelary ancestral spirits. Nowhere is the relation between men and rock closer than at Omuna; for from the heart of the hill flows a spring that does not fail in the cruellest drought. Is it a wonder the place has for ages been
144 favoured of the Veddas? But time the iconoclast breaks the oldest bonds; the half-Veddas* there to-day are not of the ancient stock; that died out some fifteen years ago.

000 Besides its association with the wild men, Omuna has other claims to interest. Like many another forest stronghold it is the site of ancient Buddhistic ruins—frescoed caves and headless, chest-battered Buddhas despoiled by treasure-hunters What induced the priests of old-time to seek such sanctuaries as this, it is hard to surmise; religious persecution perhaps, by their inveterate foes the Sivaite Tamils; or merely the claims of austere devotion. Be that as it may, it was in these fastnesses that the light of Buddhism was nursed when it flickered low, till, happening

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*There is almost certainly no Vedda living to-day without Sinhalese blood in his veins. The term *half-Vedda* therefore may appear superfluous, but is used to designate Veddas who have intermarried with the Sinhalese and settled down to agricultural pursuits, the word *Vedda* being used for the wilder folk that depend mainly on the jungle for sustenance.

[p. 34]

on serener days, it flamed through the Island making it its permanent 000
home, while in India, the land of its birth, it dwindled away.

We had undertaken this trip with the object of visiting Meminigallagolla 114
where we learned the wildest Veddas of the Eastern province lived; but on coming to Omuna we found that that place, only twelve miles away, was quite unknown to the present folk of Omuna, a pathless barrier of dense jungle intervening. We made the best of a bad job; and, abandoning our original project, struck west for Dolagalwella.

At evening we camped by a desolate pool called *Havan-kapana-walle* 103
(rush-cutting nook). There is barely a spot in these jungles, however lone, that has not its name, thanks to the nomadic Veddas. Here was a glade in which they hunted, or a pool at which they drank, there a hole in which an axe was found (*Poro-thulu-walle*).

The only indications of the track we followed were the barely recog- 000
nisable prunings, fifteen years old, of saplings. The forest was ideal for travel; in the shelter of the great trees the morning air was cool and refreshing. Coming to the Maduru Oya we walked a mile up-stream and climbed the mimosa-covered bank, soon to be lost in a wilderness of trees. A leader monkey yelled a warning to his clan, a surprised sambur belled startlingly close; but after that a silence prevailed unbroken by the song of a single bird. We spent the night by a rocky streamlet close-hugged by dense forest walls. Heavy clouds crept over us to the rumblings of thunder. The blurred crescent of the moon struggled for freedom. Our camp fires crackled in the ghostly gloom, and quiet human voices pervaded the forest's deadly stillness save for the melody of the trickling water.

> A savage place! as holy and enchanted
> As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
> By woman wailing for her demon lover.

Deserted Mahaella marked the limit of our westward journey. Here 361
we struck at right angles the northern track to Yakkure, but, before taking it, deviated south to the village of Dolagalwella. For three days we had followed uncertain game trails, and seen no human beings besides those of our company. The path now began to show signs of use; there were chipped trees, polished stones on which axes had been whetted, and fire-places where monitors were roasted. Obviously we were nearing civilisation! Indeed, here it was.

Scaling a strong stockade we found ourselves in a *chena*, some twelve
acres in extent, in which nestled the half dozen huts of the closely related 241
families of a Vedda patriarchy. The maize and *kurrukkan* crops had been taken, and the place was now rank with a catch-crop of vegetables and fruit: beans, brinjals, melons, cassava, plantains and papaws. Chillies luxuriated; there was not a compound but had its vermilion heap, not a
hut but had a section partitioned off with frame and fire-place for drying [436]
them during the rains; chillies were the current coin with which these folk traded with the pedlar Moors.

The males of the settlement were away in quest of food, and only the 609
women and children remained. No folk on earth, perhaps, are shier than Vedda women; in the presence of the stranger they are dumb.
Some of them were relatively fair-complexioned, presumably from 301
Kandyan admixture; all wore an abundance of bead ornaments, finger

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"Sedate, wistful children." (Page 36).

[facing p. 36]

30 and ear-rings and necklaces. Sober, wistful children ate raw melons or
[262] fragments of *kurrukkan* cake as hard as brick, plastered over with flies.

Indian corn and *kurrukkan*, the staple food of these people, are prepared
252 in a variety of ways. After soaking in water for twenty-four hours, they
are reduced to flour, *kurrukkan* on grind-stones, maize with pestle and
[263] mortar, and eaten in one of three forms—*talapa*, *roti*, or *pittu* appetised
with pungent sambols.

342 Let us look into one of their homes. It is windowless and dark, except
for the light that comes between the bark-slats in a hundred dazzling
353 shafts. There are two rooms; the inner small and narrow, the outer a
412 larger living room with a single doorway protected by a two foot fence—a
[251 provision for the children. At one corner is a hearth underlying a low
354 trestle bridging the wall angle, for drying flesh; at another a cage-work
containing earthen pots and garish Allervale cups and plates. Hanging
about the walls are rolled mats, oil bottles, baskets and clusters of
sheathed corn cobs. Head-high is an open ceiling containing a jumble
of things such as an old umbrella, wicker baskets, large earthen pots
and gourds. On the floor is a large grind-stone, and littered about are
shreds of mats, a deer skin or two, dirty cloths, a small pillow, a betel
[352] bag, a rush broom and a polished plank—certainly the most primitive
chair imaginable. There is also a coconut-scraper of curious design,
[252] made of a serrated iron disc wedged into the outstanding limb of a triple-branched
stem resting on its Y-shaped arms. Such are the appointments
of a *chena* Vedda's domicile.

342 These communal dwellings stockaded against beast aggression in the
351 heart of wild nature, the watch huts on the trees, the hallos all night,
proclaim the incessant struggle between man and the animals in whose
000 strong kingdom he is only a small unit. But for its inalienable hardships
the life of this people makes a homely appeal to the human heart. Nature
a capricious giver, bestows now abundantly now sparingly, and he who
would wrest a living from her must have supple thews and great
endurance.

172 Henanagalla was a place of antiquarian interest a few miles from
Dolagalwella. On the summit of a large low rock in an undulating glade
stood a broken dagaba completely obscured by a growth of big trees
and scrub. Desultory worshippers had trussed up a slab for offerings
of wild flowers. A low wall of hewn granite blocks surrounded the
structure, and a half buried monolith or two peeped out of the ruin.

Descending from here and working round through a tangle of brushwood, we came to a commodious cave quite forty paces long, showing the remains of enclosing and partitioning walls, a slotted stone for the support of a pillar and a large flat *puja* stone.

224 Besides these evidences of ancient occupation, were signs of more
recent use. The cave was obviously a resort of monitor hunters. There
252 were the long sticks with which the savoury creatures had been poked
out of deep lairs, and cooking frames where they had been roasted.
The floor was littered with their dry heads, corn-cobs and nut-shells.

172 But more interesting than all this were the crude drawings that adorned
the inner dome. Here was a veritable gallery of untutored art, wrought
with finger for brush and a mixture of ash and water for paint. There
were the most primitive representations imaginable of leopards, elephants

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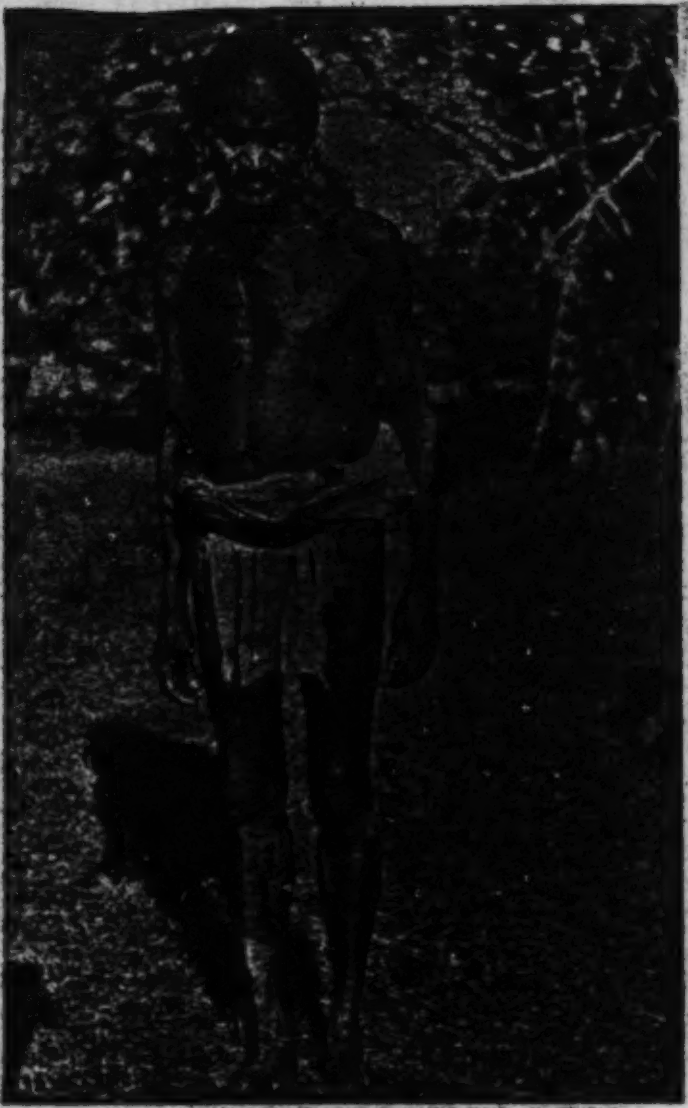

[illegible]

[facing p. 37]

with men astride them, bows fitted with tridentate arrows, and all manner 172
of cabalastic signs. Many an interesting discovery awaits here the spade
of the antiquary.

How different is the appeal of ruins buried in the remote forest, in the setting with which Time and Nature have invested them, from those set out in the trim nudity of archaeologic display with tourist-ridden roads leading up to them.

Leaving Dolagalwella we turned up north, and soon entered the first 000
of a series of great parklands we were now to traverse. These fine shooting grounds were probably centuries ago flourishing fields of paddy, fed by large artificial tanks, the crumbling embankments of which often outlie the glades. This is why, perhaps, the best game country in Ceylon to-day is to be found in the precincts of old kingdoms such as those of Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura and Tissamaharama.

We had put up for the night on a river bed many miles from the nearest 609
settlement, when, to our surprise, a man armed with bow and arrows
walked into camp. Approaching us without the least diffidence, he tapped
us familiarly on the chest and looked us up and down appraisingly,
speaking an incomprehensible jargon. Kombua, he happened to be, a
Vedda of Dambana, a score of miles away. He affected ignorance of
Sinhalese, and maintained the farce all the time he was with us; but if
we wanted evidence that he was imposter in this, we had it the next [191]
morning when our cook accidentally dropped an ember on him: "This
devil wants to burn me," he said in excellent Sinhalese, taken off his 142
guard. A picturesque fellow was old Kombua, spare, sparse-bearded
and beady-eyed. From his gaping ear-holes dangled loosely doubled 301
strings of white beads. In a small bundle knotted round his waist was
his baggage, and let into his waist-string was a small axe. He was 412
alertness itself as he guided us the following day. His deep-set eyes took in everything. The flick of a leaf would petrify him on the instant, often with foot uplifted like a startled retriever; the faintest hum and he would search aloft, for honey is food to the Vedda.

The glades teemed with nesting green-pigeons. From many a low 000
bough we started a bird, to discover its clutch of white eggs showing through the meagre nest. I was manoeuvring to add a couple of imperial pigeons to our menu, when of a sudden there was a flutter at my elbow and a jungle hen floated away into the cover of the bordering scrub. I had but to turn my head to discover her mottled eggs in a charred stump. The twigs and creepers about the nest gave it just that air of negligence that was its sole concealment. I debated with my companion as to the freshness of our find. "Oh, they contain young ones right enough; just feel how heavy they are," he said taking an egg in his hand with an air of expertness that disguised a tender heart. I had no pretensions to such skill, but knowing that a jungle hen lays some six to a dozen eggs and seeing that here were only three, decided to rob them, and justifiably as it turned out when we enjoyed them with bacon the following morning.

Coming to a stream we heard, closer than we had ever done before, 136
the melodious mocking of that elusive cuckoo, *cuculus micropterus*. I
asked Kombua to show it to me. "He cannot be seen," was the confident 825
assertion of a Sinhalese. The Vedda awaited a repetition of the note,
then peered into the dense foliage of a tall tree and in a trice was pointing

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A Vedda girl of Dolagalwella (Page 35)

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Yakkure tank. (Page 39)

[Facing p. 38]

V 136 825 to something; but it was long before I saw the bird, a veritable leaf among the leaves and more motionless than they.

The hilly jungles of central Ceylon echo, during certain seasons of the year, to this bird's incessant cry, the popular onomatopoeic renderings of which are, in English, "Captain Philpotts" and "Bring the tappal" and in Sinhalese "*Botuahappan*." Most people have heard, but very

S 539 few seen, the shy author of these dolorous notes. There is a gruesome story associated with the bird:—A Sinhalese king once asked his dhoby, in order to test his marital fidelity, whether he would cut his wife's neck and bring him her head! "Oh! king," said the man falling at the monarch's feet, "even if you behead me I cannot do such a thing." The following day the king called up the dhoby's wife and made a similar request of her. She replied that she would do it. Going home she helped her husband with his bath, rubbed boiled limes on his head, and cooked him a good meal. Like a good wife she asked him to lay his head on her lap where he soon fell asleep. Then, with a knife she had in readiness, she cut his throat; and severing his neck, put the head into a pot, covered it with a cloth and carried it to the king. On the way she met a man who, singing, asked her, "What do you carry in the pot on your head?"

"I am taking *mee amba** to the king," answered the woman.

"Why cover it so carefully?" sang he.

"If I take them uncovered, wayfarers will ask me for them," she replied. "It is on a fine journey I go."

When she brought her gift to the king, he was incensed at her cruelty, and ordered her head to be struck off instantly. Ever after, has she gone about in the form of this bird, crying *botua-kappan* (cut the throat), as her one refrain.

000 While making our way through a tree-studded glade, we surprised two men carrying sacks of dried meat on their shoulders; through rents in the bags peeped unsavoury scraps of sambur, monkey and pig. Their first impulse on seeing us was to escape; for to shoot sambur legitimately, gun and game licences are necessary; and what money have they for these, who have barely the wherewithal to purchase the ammunition for their ramshackle muzzle-loaders.

V 533 When we camped, Kombua regaled us with Vedda songs of questionable taste chanted rapidly in a high nasal monotone, lengthened indefinitely by endless repetition, and accompanied in the last staves with a clapping

V 411 of hands. To the suggestion that he should show his skill in archery he responded with alacrity; jumping up, he seized his weapons as if confident of skill. A fragment of paper, six inches square, placed fifteen paces away, was the mark. At the word he loosed his arrow. A clean miss! He walked up to the target and dashed it down in dudgeon, and nothing would induce him to shoot again. Archery is a lost art to the Veddas, though they still have considerable skill in fashioning bows and arrows. Jungles that echo to guns are no places for bowmen.

V 576 Kombua's farewell was as bizarre as his greeting of us. Tossing head and hands in the direction we were taking, and tapping us on the chest, he wished us good going in tones more peremptory than complaisant.

V 515 Quite a number of our carriers were half-Veddas. There was one whose constant occupation was to run his fingers comb-fashion through his upstanding hair scraping out vermin. His expression was of that thoughtful seriousness which is the surest mark of profound vacuity.

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*A species of mango.

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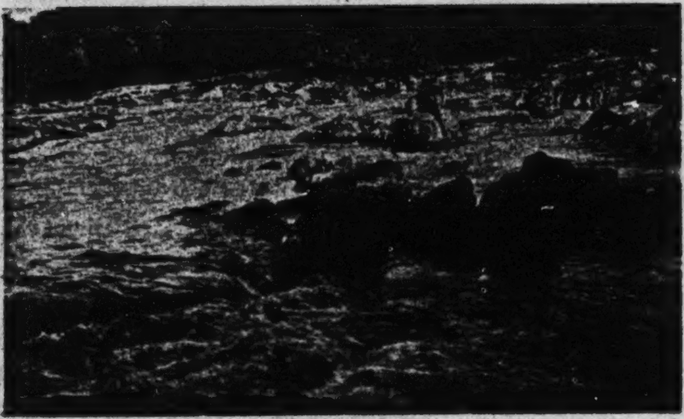

Dastota falls. (Page 39)

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Sinna, a Vedda of Gunner's Quoin. (Page 42)

[facing p. 39]

2. YAKKURE

This be the verse you grave for me;
Here he lies where belonged to be;
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.

R. L. STEVENSON

THROUGH a lush meadow studded with fragrant wood-apple, we entered Kalukola Eba a hamlet of some twenty huts nestling in the picturesque dishabille of a *chena* rank with maize, vegetables and chillies. Here as elsewhere in the Vanni there was much evidence of parangi (framboesia). Fully three-fourths of the people showed active or quiescent traces of the disease. A boy had a necklace of loathsome papules; a woman covered with nodes in practically every bone of her body was boiling a decoction of dry leaves as a salve; another was stewing monitor flesh in chilli-water. 600

The first sign of our nearness to Yakkure was a cattle-pen stamped clean, 231 where half a dozen boys were securing cows and yearlings for the night. Scratching around the stockade with the tameness of domestic fowls were a jungle cock and his dames, and from every side came the jerky cries of wild chanticleers. A cairn of tumbled stones marked the site of 172 an old *vihara*. Blue in the distance, across a wide lagoon bordered with sedge, lotus and dead trees, stood the long rock called Gunner's Quoin, with a bare patch, high on its tree-mantled flank, pointed out to us as the Maraweethiya, a historic cave.

Yakkure itself was a negligently palisaded hamlet nestling ina grove of 361 tamarinds, in full view of a beautiful tank. We were unfortunate in our choice of a camping place. Five days of seclusion in the forest had made us forget that the immediate proximity to a village always meant flies, smells, and embarrassing attentions from forward men and coy but curious women. There were other draw-backs too. At sunset, from a pool near by, came a low, ominous hum auguring ill for our night's rest. We lit fires, bestowed meticulous care on bed curtains, and bedaubed ourselves with mosquitol. The lapwing's desolate cry, the doleful music of water fowl, the booming of great owls, the distant trumpeting of elephants, and more than all, the baffled mosquito murmur around, soon lulled me to sleep. But my companion who had failed to stop up betimes several holes in his curtain, the inside of which was found at dawn to be plastered with a blood-sodden host, tells a different story!

Three miles from Yakkure are the well-known falls of the Mahaweli. 133
At flood-time their thunder is heard at the village. Once in a decade [731]
the waters creep up to and submerge the huts, sending the people up trees, and their cattle into the forest to be drowned or killed by leopards.
With a *kapua* (priest) for guide, for the place is held eerie, we set out to [779]
visit the falls. Skirting an ancient aqueduct (*yoda ella*) which tapped the river a mile above the falls, we came to open jungle bordering the banks, that allowed us free passage through its colonnades of giant

[p. 39]

133 timber. Such places are the favourite resort of sambur, of which on this morning we saw no less than six. From great tree-heights came the whirring of strong wings as gibbous-beaked hornbills took alarm. We were perhaps a half-mile from the falls when we first heard them like a pervasive hum of swarming bees. Soon we lost the noise; and turning to our guide for an explanation, learnt, inconsequently enough, that "the water does not cry after the morning; it cries loudest when the cock crows at dawn!" The sound swelled suddenly again as there opened before us, not the turbulent cascade we expected, but placid murmuring rapids that swirled in a wide sheet around and over a thousand sunnied boulders. Such were the falls as we saw them; but on occasion they could be a roaring power leaping over the granite to a wild cataract melody, surging widely to the outskirts of Yakkure itself, and bestrewing the jungle with great wrack that even now lay stranded high on forked tree-trunks. What wonder the place is held in awe and that men have a care how they journey to it, lest they be lost on the way or fall a prey to beast or demon.

172 A smooth rock on the bank bore the frettings of ancient craft; the
778 tutelary god's *devale* (temple) it was said to be. Here we were irreverently
seated, while our guides sat apart whispering at the profanation. The
surface of the rock was socketed presumably to hold strong stanchions
[782] which in the old days supported a bridge across the water; while small
oval pools, reputed to contain a mint of wealth from the accumulation
of years of propitiatory and votive offerings, showed to our pagan vision
nothing more than a few potato-like pebbles and sportive water beetles.

000 A few months before our visit, Yakkure was the setting of a gallant episode:—On the bund of the Polonnaruwa tank stands a shanty for forest-officers on circuit. Here one evening a wiry man of forty-five was amusing himself with his rifle. Placing a rupee against a tree fifty yards away he fired, holing it in the centre. He next made his targets a variety of live things that flecked the smooth surface of the tank, such as a cormorant or the barely visible head of a submerged crocodile. Every time his aim was true. The shots attracted a friend. "Testing your nerves as usual before an adventure?" he asked, walking up. "What is it this time? The Yakkure rogue* I'll bet."

"Yes, to-morrow I hope to get him," was the confident response. "You haven't seen *this* before, have you?" said the hunter handling his new rifle.

"You know best," said his friend; "but I should have brought a tried weapon if I were you, especially against such a beast as the Yakkure rogue is said to be. Only yesterday he smashed a boy to pulp. The villagers are too scared to leave their homes."

"This gun is all right. I've tested it. See," said he, indicating his hits, "I've been warned time and again against the use of light arms for elephants, but they have never failed me so far. Once, though," he continued thoughtfully "I had a near shave......... You know, I sometimes wonder whether the villagers appreciate what I do for them."

"They look on you as their greatest benefactor," replied his friend.

"It is good to know that," said the hunter. "For the last fifteen years, whenever I heard of a rogue in my province, I've gone after him; often at great trouble and expense."

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*A dangerous elephant ostracised by the herd, and a menace to human life and property.

At day-break the hunter set out accompanied by the headman of Dastota, the village at which the elephant had last been seen. Here the animal could not be found. Crossing the Mahaweli, they followed the spoor only to lose it at Yakkure, late in the afternoon. The hunter had sat down to his first meal for the day, when a man came with the news that he had just seen the elephant. Gulping down half his food and keeping the rest for the night, for he now determined to stay over and shoot the animal, the hunter hurried to the place accompanied by several villagers. Hardly had they entered a field, than they saw the beast. Stealing to within ten fathoms of him the hunter fired four shots in rapid succession; but the elephant turned into the forest with the hunter at his heels. Two more shots had no effect.

Slipping six new cartridges into the magazine, and accompanied by a single tracker carrying a paradox, he followed the animal into dense scrub. Missing the spoor they turned to trace it, when the tracker spied the elephant within a few paces of them. Before he could give warning the animal charged. The tracker fled. The hunter stepped forward and fired; but the elephant advanced. At five yards he fired again, and failing to stop the brute, got behind a small *chela* tree and put in his last shot. The elephant was now almost on him, with trunk extended; he applied himself closer to the tree. Before the fatal mistake could be retrieved, man and tree were clasped in an iron grip and shaken several times. With amazing *sang froid* the man wriggled free of the hold, and leant against the foreleg of the elephant, which now trumpeted and turned away into the jungle, but in doing so trod on the hunter's leg fracturing it.

How one who invariably killed his elephant with the first shot, failed in this instance to stop one with nine, is a riddle hard to guess. So much for new rifles and trackers with paradoxes!

When the villagers came on the scene they found the hunter on the ground, with his broken cartridge belt beside him. To them he did not seem badly hurt, except for a fractured and bleeding leg.

"Take me away soon," he moaned. "I am feeling very bad; the elephant crushed me against the tree."

A sophisticated individual suggested his making a dying declaration.

"What's the use of that?" he said. "You all can say what happened; only take me away soon to Polonnaruwa."

They carried him on a rough stretcher they improvised.. He uttered no word, except to ask for water which they advised him against, saying they could not say what might be wrong inside. When crossing the Mahaweli he repeated his request, and was again dissuaded. They were three miles from Polonnaruwa when, refusing to wait any longer, he insisted on drinking. He drank, and told them to hurry; with a mile of their destination, he was dead.

Thus was T. C. Wiggin slain by his thirty-sixth elephant, which in its turn was afterwards found dead five miles from the scene of the encounter. A more modest sportsman it would be hard to find; he belonged to the aristocracy of great hunters. At Polonnaruwa they buried him. What fitter resting place? His tomb-stones are the ruins of the temples and palaces of a mighty kingdom; his requiem the plaintive songs of pigeons roosting at sundown.

3. THE MARAWEETHIYA

Far or forgot to me is near,
Shadow and sunlight are the same;
The vanished gods to me appear
And one to me are shame and fame.

EMERSON

13 FROM Yakkure to Horiwila is six miles. The first part of the journey is through marsh; here the Mahaweli make a bend which all but encroaches on the path. The place is rank with vegetation. Tall grass thrives amidst sombre trees that stand apart, clothed out of all recognition in stoles of trailing mycania. The air is humid and oppressively still. One is glad to be rid of the swampy luxuriance with its strong suggestion of malaria.

Beyond a pleasant stretch of paddy, closer than we had ever seen it before, stood Gunner's Quoin. Tinkling cow-bells and the mournful cries of peafowl welcomed us to Horiwila.

361 144 The racial types we have passed, will repay review. Omuna, Dolagalwella and Kalukolu Eba were shifting *chena* settlements inhabited by Veddas with a large proportion of Sinhalese blood. Yakkure was a permanent village with the *chenas* apart; here the people called themselve Veddas but showed strong Tamil traits. The folk of Horiwila were not sure whether to call themselves Tamils or Veddas; while Manampitiya, beyond Horiwila, was a purely Tamil village. So does propinquity shape the type of Vedda, and forest penetration by the Sinhalese on the one hand and Tamils on the other, tend to obliterate the aboriginal race.

000 Decoyed by its beauty, we camped on a rock on the bund of the Horiwila tank, soon to learn that a stone exposed all day to the sun, was not the most desirable of camping places even at night. The stored heat radiating from the rock kept us awake till morning, and we rose quite unrefreshed for the good day's work before us, for to-day we would climb the Quoin, which, ever since we saw it across the marsh at Yakkure, beckoned us on. The Tamils of the place could only take us to the base
115 of the hill; from there a Vedda of the Ulpotta must guide us. It was quite an hour before we found him. I recognised him at once as Sinna an old friend; there were the bunions on his shoulder from carrying loads of lizards and yams, and there the hooked finger caused by a snake-bite
[N2 when plucking a *hanava* comb from a creviced tree. A dwarf, with
157] frizzly upstanding hair and wild eyes, and shy almost to timidity, Sinna had nothing of the sophisticated Vedda about him. He lived alone with
[166] his small family at the end of the rock. The rest of his people had left when the *kurrukkan* crop failed: but Sinna remained to gather a precarious living from the scanty pickings of the field. We came on him searching for food in the forest.

The poor fellow was in great distress that morning, his favourite dog having been taken by a leopard the previous night. Hearing the animal's cries he had rushed in vain to the rescue. It speaks much for the 115 dominance of man over animals that this puny fellow, armed only with [412] a small hatchet, could live with impunity in such surroundings; and moreover leave his wife and children unprotected in their fragile leaf-hut [342] while he was out in quest of food.

"Cha," I heard Sinna ruminating sorrowfully to himself, "the *goe*-[231] catching dog is gone."

"Have you no other?" I asked.

"The one that's left isn't much good," he said. "With the bitch I [224] lost I could catch six *goyes** a day."

The way to the caves was up the heavily-wooded, boulder-encumbered 13 side of the hill, plentiful with caves of bear, porcupine and wild cat. On the sandy floor of one dark den were the footprints of a bear and her cubs that had just vacated it. Sinna was well ahead of us, as we clambered on trembling knees regardless of all else but where to gain foot-hold, when a timorous one called out to the Vedda from below, "There now, if a bear should come, don't you run away and climb a tree."

The little chap wagged his head acquiescingly. I asked him what he would do in such an event.

"We will also strike; he will also bite," was the cool reply.

Gaining a spur, at length we attained the first of the series of caves known as the Maraweethiya. A strong aroma of bats greeted us. Ant-hills grew out of the dusty floor of the cave, the plastered dome of which [172] was ornamented with frescoes of Buddhas and *devas*. A decayed wooden image stood behind a flat altar stone supported on bricks, many of which lay fallen about. A broken wall partially shut in the cave, and another divided it off from a deep pool of crystalline water.

From here a passage protected by a low wall led through a narrow gulley flanked by small trees; thence by way of spurs, tunnels and deep grottoes we came to a shallow cave in full face of the sky, where we were the cause of much concern to a pair of peregrine falcons. They hovered above us crying perturbedly; now they would swoop boldly down almost within reach of our hands; now wing away with harsh cackling cries of alarm, as they discovered us handling their eggs, that lay amidst the debris of brick and tile.

Ahead was a fearsome pass, which we must negotiate to reach the last of the caves. It was no more than a shallow, sloping notch in the sheer side of the rock, overlooking a drop of about three hundred feet, and with [778 seemingly nothing beyond it but eternity. On hands and knees we crawled through and were mightily relieved to find ourselves in the 782] security of a large grotto. Here, before two patched stone images, we found a few of our carriers devoutly kneeling; on an altar-stone were their meagre oblations of ixora blooms they had gathered on the way. The virtue, it would seem, lay less in the quality of the offerings than in the attainment of this inhospitable shrine with its weathered and lonely gods.

We could go no farther; but hence along the crazy edge of the hill was the merest semblance of a break-neck way that led, we were told, to the ancient kingdom of the *rakshayas* (demons) with its foot-wide

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*Monitor lizard

13 causeway over an abysmal ravine. We had not the stomach to tempt those ways.

Below us stretched a vast forest studded with the tree-clad hills of Omuna, Henanagalla and many another; and over the red-topped *kongs* we caught the glimpse of the Mahaweli as it cleft the wilderness of trees.

173 To this retreat once came an ascetic who lived alone, lost in meditation, for months. His evening chant could be heard at Horiwila three miles away. The bears that came to drink at the pools in the caves did him no harm. In a hidden vault, so the story goes, he found a gold-lettered slab and a phial of oil. He made the wisdom of the script his own, and drank the oil; then descended the rock, and ever after went about as one obsessed.

115 [301] Sinna's droll talk relieved the irksomeness of our descent. Indicating a wild jasmine, he told us they were the flowers Vedda women strung on creeper-stems for the adornment of their hair. He was for leaving us at the foot of the hill and continuing his search for food for his waiting family. But we took him to camp, fed him abundantly on rice and venison and gave him a heavy hamper besides. It was pleasant to picture the rare joy of his home-coming.

000 At Manampitiya old Kanapan-*vidane* met us with two limes which he graciously presented to us. This charming Tamil custom is often the prelude to a villainous request. Kanapan gave us cordial welcome, eyed solicitously our unkempt figures, and chided us in a kindly, paternal way for undertaking so 'terrible' a journey. "Why wander in the wilderness when you can play about the highways in your car?" he said. His conversation, though varied kept reverting to one theme—the delinquencies of the village school-master, now away on a holiday. Kanapan had a penchant for denunciation; on a previous occasion it was the tyranny of an apothecary, now it concerned the amours of a pedagogue.

"Is that the sort of man to teach young children?" he concluded disgustedly. "A man who breaks up quiet homes. The woman does not even care for him; he bewitched her with charmed food. A respectable home wrecked by a worthless fellow!" and he spat with scorn.

Perhaps it was the full bottle of whisky standing tantalisingly on the table that induced him to confide in us that the village tavern had now been closed for over two years, during which time he had not touched a drink; he had almost forgotten the taste of liquor he said wistfully.

"Then you are a total abstainer now?" I ventured.

"What's to be done, sir, I have to be," he sighed.

"I suppose you wouldn't have a drink now if one were given you?" I asked.

"How can I refuse when a gentleman offers," said he, taking the wind out of my sails. "With your favour, sir, I will. Cha," he continued with sudden affection, "I feared you had been to the war and got killed. How glad I am to see you again, sir."

We poured him a bumper which he swallowed neat, placing the empty cup within easy reach beside him. He reverted to the school-master;

and went on to tell us of the faithful services he (Kanapan) had rendered 5DO Government for over a score of years, and of his two sons on whose education he had spent much, and who were now out of employment. One of them, he submitted, had an aptitude for teaching; did he not know three languages? Who better than he to teach at Manampitiya? He begged us to use our influence to have this worthy installed in place of that son of a......who now so unworthily filled the post. And all for two limes?

His frequent glances at the bottle earned him a second drink, which he tossed off commenting, just audibly, that it was only two gulps. A third soon followed, with which he nearly choked himself in attempting to demonstrate that it was only three gulps.

Solicitous as Kanapan was of our comfort before, he became trebly so now. He fanned away mosquitoes from us, commented feelingly on our tick-bites, and declared his intention not to go away till he had seen us to bed. As his blood warmed, matters of the heart became his theme. He confessed to being an adept at love-philtres, and knew a herbal decoction which, did you but dip an eikel in it and touch the woman you fancied, would induce her to climb after you even to heaven.

"But what's the use of charms, sir," he said. "When I was young I had only to sing to bring a woman, however virtuous, to my feet." This from one who denounced as worthless dog an individual with a single lapse.

The interval between drinks evidently getting too prolonged, he related deeds of prowess he had wrought as tracker in the old days, and the fabulous meed of liquor he had earned from grateful sportsmen. That secured him a fourth bumper more liberal than any previous. Stroking the burning liquor down his throat (diluents he abhorred), he returned to his educational mission which he had now almost forgotten, prompted thereto by sundry nudgings and whisperings from his son who had stolen to his side in the dark. Vague promises did not satisfy him now; he wanted assurances. He forgot himself so far as to aver his intention not to leave us till he had seen the bottom of the bottle. Nor did he

We challenged him to walk; he did that tolerably well. But the collapse was complete when it came. His attentions became so embarrassing that we asked his son to lead him home. In taking affectionate leave he spilt all over us the only drinks we had poured for ourselves that evening. As he plunged hither and thither in the dark we heard him mutter, "That sort of gentleman is my father!"

It was a sad Kanapan who met us the next morning begging for medicine that would relieve the terrible pain in his stomach. He excused himself from accompanying us farther, but entrusted us to the keeping of his hopeful son.

CHAPTER V

WESTMINSTER ABBEY AND FRIAR'S HOOD

I. WESTMINSTER ABBEY

I know not where the white road runs,
nor what the blue hills are,
But a man can have a sun for friend,
and for his guide a star ;
And there's no end of voyaging when once
the voice is heard,
For the river calls and the road calls, and oh !
the call of a bird.

GERALD GOULD

133 FROM some dominant height in the central uplands of Ceylon one can survey, to east and south, a vast sea of hill-studded forest. The scene, when glowing with the hues of evening, might well take its place among the panoramas of the world. In this medley of mountains there is one, a long ridge rising at one end to a square tower, which seldom fails to arrest the fancy. Westminster Abbey it is called by those who view it from afar, Govinda Hela by those with closer acquaintance of it. Well to the north of this is a peak, tall and lonely, known as Friar's Hood —the *Capello de Frade* of the old Portuguese mariners to whom it was a land-mark by which to evade their mortal foes the Dutch, " the rebels from Europe " as their despatches called them. *Omne ignotum pro magnifico est*, says Tacitus ; but does near knowledge always rob reality of romance ? We shall see.

776 The inhabitants of Siyambala Anduwa, half way between Muppane and Pottuvil, are a simple folk ingrained with jungle superstition : That river beneath the bridge was haunted by demons ; it was not safe to go there alone at night, or to bathe there by noon especially with scented soap, for this attracted devils who showed their displeasure by hammering on the bridge or throwing sand ; a small boy digging in the river-bed was swallowed into the earth and rescued only to die of a fever a few days later. Apparitions were seen in the form of dwarfs who shot up to the proportions of trees and suddenly disappeared, striking the beholder with terror. As for children you could not bring up " those things " in these parts. The *gawara* was a buffalo-like beast possessed of a tongue so horny that when it licked man or animal the flesh dissolved away leaving only the bones. The *Nittaewo* were a pigmy race, that lived at one time in the Kattragam country of Lenama not far away. These hairy cannibals attacked in companies, driving their long nails into the

776 flesh which they tore out and ate. They were afraid only of the buffalo and the dog. The Veddas, not very long ago, are said to have herded the last of them into a cave and destroyed them. Brute or man, persistent rumour in jungle countries brings the *Nittaewo* within the realm of the probable.

Entering the forest at Siyambala Anduwa, and working north, we strove to maintain a route as far removed as possible from civilisation represented by the coast road on the one hand, and the Badulla-Batticaloa road on the other.

173 Two miles within the jungle was the old path, now over-grown and abandoned, from Badulla to Pottuvil. It led hereabouts through a narrow pass guarded, it is said, a few generations ago by the Karande Hela Vedda who, having fenced it across, levied toll on travellers. Intercepting, as he did, a trade route from the interior to the coast, we may be certain he made a good thing of it, getting his share both of the *kurrukkan*, maize, vegetables and fruit of the *Vanni*, as well as of the paddy, salt and dry fish of the Coast.

172 Kandanketiya, nine miles from Siyambala Anduwa, boasts an ancient temple of the era of Dutugemunu. We found it in the keeping of a doddering priest of eighty, who showed us round, all the while muttering "hu-hu, hu-hu," his only form of comment. His bed-room, dark, airless and dirty, was better adapted to mice and spiders than human beings. A great brass spittoon, emptied he told us once in two weeks, was the proudest thing there. A stupendous bo-tree, planted by himself, mocked with its vigour the withered frame of him who had tended it. Throwing open the doors of his little temple, without much ado he bade us enter the holy of holies, and pointed proudly to pictures of *devas* and harpies, half spurred-fowl half woman, who he confidently asserted lived in the Himalayas. Incidentally he indicated a money-box on the altar. But no sooner were our donations secure than his interest in us rapidly declined, reaching its climax when we told him we were going: "All right, go," he said, settling down comfortably on his bed.

136 A hornbill flying repeatedly to a large tree attracted our attention. Perching itself wood-pecker-wise on the trunk, it fed the occupant of a hole there with berries which it brought out of its crop one by one. We were told this was the male feeding the female he had deprived of feathers and shut up in the hole. We suggested there might be young. "Not so," said a woman; "where then are the feathers and droppings at the root of the tree?" Here was an opportunity to test the truth of gossip we had heard regarding the domestic amenities of hornbills. A man was sent up to the nest. Squeezing his hand through the narrow opening he produced an egg; then seized something by the beak, and unsuccessfully tried to pull it through. With an axe he enlarged the hole and soon handed down to us a veritable travesty of a bird. Scared out of her wits, voiceless, featherless, with half-opened beak, she flapped pathetic wings and tumbled ludicrously about in attempts to escape. She was obviously unfit for existence in the outer world and we returned her to her dark abode. Rumour was right, the male hornbill took no risks.

361 Bowala village lies at the northern end of Westminster Abbey. Buried as we were in the forest depths, we had not seen the hill since leaving the heights of Haputale. Suddenly the leviathan bulked over the trees. "There, that is why it is called Govinda Hela*," said our guide pointing [103]

**Goa indo hela*—rock where the monitor lizard is.

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Deserted Bowala (Page 48)

[Facing p.48]

361 [103] to a cleft fragment of stone resembling a giant lizard crawling up the sheer face of the rock.

[241] We found Bowala deserted. The young coconut and areca palms, plantains, sugar-canes and pine-apples there were choked with grass and lantana. The huts were falling to pieces and leaked like sieves as we found to our cost when a shower overtook us; the grass thatch, ruined [136] by white ants, was the home of innumerable rats, brahmin-lizards and poisonous *karawalas** that hung head-down from the rafters ready to strike.

221 The desolate state of the hamlet is explainable by the *chena* life of the people. In December, as the crops ripen, they forsake their homes for the shacks of the *chena*, leaving perhaps an aged couple behind. In April, when the crops of *kurrukhan* and maize have been taken, they return to the village to repair their huts and wean back to life such plants as have survived the inroads of wild animals and weeds. In July, *chena* land is leased again; and so the wasteful routine is repeated. 621 A hamlet occupied for six months and abandoned for six has not much chance of headway. If the population of a village is at all numerous, there are sufficient people to occupy both *chena* and village, without detriment to either; if the community is very small they remain *chena* dwellers with no permanent homes; if intermediate, we find the state of things at Bowala. In favoured places a mere nucleus of human beings swells in time to a thriving and populous village. But in the insalubrious *Vanni* privation and ignorance keep the numbers low. Two dwindling villages may combine to save one from extinction. Often a place populous to-day is a wilderness to-morrow and *vice versa*. This is typical of the kaleidoscopic way the forest hamlets change. Names so fine on maps—Illukpitiya, Mahaella, Embillene—are found when reached to be derelict; a crumbling hut perhaps hidden in jungle, or a hardy tamarind or palmyrah the sole witness of vanished homes.

101 Bowala folk are better jungle men than many farther inland. Though [262] far from fastidious in their choice of meats, for they eat the mongoose and rat, they abhor the porcupine, sure mark of Vedda ancestry. They [287] fashion bags of beaten *riti* bark and carry pouches of monkey skin that [281] ladies might envy. Their bed-frames are spanned with sambur-hide, 415 their powder flasks are the dried scrota of sambur. A monkey skin, stretched over a coconut shell fitted with handle, screw and string, and [534] manipulated with a small bow, serves them as a violin out of which they scrape mournful disharmonies. They snare the smaller animals, such as 224 the hare, pangolin and chevrotan, with *habbakas* or weighted frames poised over passages used by these animals; we saw one of these set for 222 chevrotan with a bundle of urine-drenched leaves for bait. Some among 481 them could brave the formidable heights of Westminster Abbey in quest of the combs of the rock bee—the most hazardous of jungle pursuits.

000 We spent the night in a large cave at the base of Westminster Abbey and made the ascent next morning, replenishing our water bottles at a small basin formed by the buttressing roots of a rock-tamarind and rejoicing in the grandiloquent name, for so trivial a thing, of *Kothuru-pathaha* (gnat-water-hole).

It had rained all night and there was still a drizzle. Squeezing through crevices, crouching through low caves, climbing trees, clinging to rough

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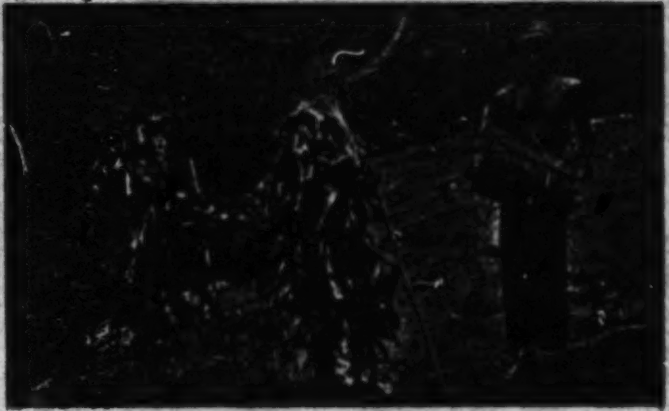
*Small venomous snakes.

5: Spittel II-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

Habbaha, a weighted frame-work for trapping animals. (Page 48)



The dancers of Bowala. (Page 48)

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Bag made of threshed *riti* bark and monkey skin pouch. (Page 48)

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[Facing p. 49]

ladders prepared for us beforehand, we made the laborious ascent; 000
finally shinning up the interlacing roots of an obliging banyan tree
that gripped a great hump of rock, we attained the summit of
the northern bastion. Here we found the usual signs of old-world [172]
occupation: cisterns and seats cut out of the living rock, fragments of
brick and pottery, and strong stone walls overrun with scrub and pine-apple.

The heightλ was desolate but for wild cats, and songless but for the 133
boom of wanderoo far below. A ceaseless drizzle blanketed in mist the
superb view of forest and hill we commanded; but every now and then
the mist lifted and showed the graceful contours of the ranges. There,
crouching like a headless beast, its neck indrawn, was magnificent Wadina-
gala; to the south was the long straight ridge of Moneragala; and close [103]
at hand were the twin domes named by the Veddas *Thenagoda* (breast
mounds) and behind them *Thenakirigoda* (breast milk mound) with
wracks of milky mist caressing their summits.

On our descent we were better able to discern certain features of the 222
rock the rain had so far hidden from us. Out of long horizontal fissures 481
high on the perpendicular face of the hill, projected numerous sticks driven in for foot-hold by honey-gatherers; and dangling from the summit was a long cane that had once borne a daring fellow within reach of seemingly unassailable hives. Here we heard a marvellous tale: A Vedda of Bowala once saw a heap of wax that had accumulated on a ledge which an overhanging brow of rock made inaccessible. Nothing daunted, he armed himself with a torch and sambur-horn, descended by just such a cane as we now saw, and swung himself to and fro within reach of the wax, heating it with the torch each time he approached it. When he thought the mass sufficiently molten he stuck the horn deep into it and waited till it set. Then swinging himself once more towards it and seizing hold of the embedded horn, he leaped on to the ledge collected the wax, and swung off again. He did this year by year. On the last occasion, the horn not being sufficiently secure, the poor fellow was dashed to death among the trees and stones below. His wife who had witnessed the tragedy carried back word, "*Meena kalanghal-angne popeloroi*," which being onomatopoeic hardly requires rendering.

Our departure from Bowala was ceremonial. On the path stood a 535
drummer, with two boyish figures disguised from head to foot in dry 302
plantain leaves, that were plaited into tails behind. Their faces were hidden by speckled masks made from fragments of gourd-rind, with slits for eyes and mouth, and a blob of resin with fibres attached for nose and beard. Their bare feet and hands were the only indications that these scare-crows were in reality human beings.

The drummer struck; the dance began. The time twelve noon. The 535
floor a root-ridden path bestrewn with elephant droppings and intercepted
by beflowered streams. The walls, bordering forest trees festooned with
great lianas on which parrots chattered. The dazzling sky above. For
orchestra, the staccato rhythm of the drum, the jangling bells that [534]
studded the deerskin greaves of the dancers, the sound of a falling branch
perhaps, or the short, sharp clamorous outburst of chirping cicalas. For
a mile or more the performers led the way with a swaying two-step
dance, hopping circularly on one leg to let us catch up did they out-
distance us. At the next village the drummer wore the greaves, and

λ[the hill called Westminster Abbey. -Analyst]

Gypsies E15
Ceylon

535 with muscular grace, performed the flower dance to the Peradeniya god for the favour of crops.

V 562 303 755 252 The women of Kadiniyaya slunk into their hovels at sight of us. A man sat scraping the hair off a girl's scalp with a blunt knife; another was muttering a spell over some lime juice for a fevered wretch. Swarming blue-bottles and a most unholy odour led to the discovery, in a covered hole, of putrid sambur entrails awaiting the pot; like civilised epicures they apparently fancied their game high!

V 103 G 101 105 Wadinagala, the southern Friar's Hood (the mountain that rose to Buddha's bidding), towered before us as we lay encamped in the picturesque little village of Landegama. Here we learnt that a company of gipsies, some fifty strong, had preceded us. These forest gangs, unlike those of the road, are nomadic shepherds, pasturing their herds in the jungle plains. They hunt the sambur with dogs and javelin. Approaching coastal towns from time to time they barter their cattle, and are on the whole fairly prosperous. But a gipsy is a gipsy the world over, faithful to traditions of snake-craft and beggary, and these are no exception, plying their trade among the poor villagers with an eye to a handful of grain or vegetables. Sooner or later we hoped to meet them, but for the present all the evidence we had of them were abandoned hearths and a helpless pup they had heartlessly abandoned.

V 539 At Landegama was a hunter who entertained us far into the night with jungle tales. He described to us how leopards caught monkeys. The animal climbs a tree in the line of feeding langurs, and waits concealed. When one of them comes near enough he springs on it and both fall to the ground. Should the attempt fail, the leopard gives forth a series of fearful growls and rushes hither and thither making great commotion; then suddenly becomes quiet and hides. Inquisitiveness is the monkeys' undoing; at first, uttering their cries of rage and terror, the 'ah-he-hik' so familiar to hunters, they look for him from secure heights; but not seeing him they become bolder and bolder and come down lower and lower; until eventually, one pays the price of his foolhardiness.

V 342 361 Wadinagala village, singularly enough, lies farther from the rock of that name than Landegama which nestles at its foot. Here was a medley of huts well illustrating the various types prevalent in the *Vanni*. The roofs of all were *illuk*-thatched; but the walls were various: a few were made of mud, some of wattle and bast, others of wattle and maize sheaths or of leafy twigs; while most had two or more of these combined.

000 V [132] A sudden shower, that caught us as we rested on the banks of the Palang Oya, proved the harbinger of many wet days to come. That evening we entered Kokunahare in the pelting rain, our clothes, bedding and food deplorably drenched. Rushing into the first hut we found we ousted its occupants with gentle persuasion. Cooking was out of the question; but our ever-ready lunch basket provided a menu of tongue, fruit salad, biscuits and cheese, and a thermos-flaskful of hot tea. What shifts the shivering carriers made for food or sleep we had not the courage to inquire.

Borrowing mats (and incidentally a wilderness of bugs that befriended us for many a long night) we spread them over our sodden bedding and prepared to sleep, when our host looked in to ask us, by way of saying good night, to be so good as to drive away any elephants that might visit the plantain grove in which we were placed! informing us, that only a few days previously, one of these animals had dined off a quarter acre of his cassava. How apposite is the Sinhalese saw: "When you travel take with you the pig's snout, the bull's back, the coucal's eye and the peacock's ear."

The morning though cloudy gave promise of sunshine. Crows, drongos, spurfowl and barbets were as glad of the dawn as we; and so was a jungle cock that preened his bedraggled plumes on a sun-kissed snag at the edge of the garden; but he, poor fellow, soon hung head-down from our eaves.

2. GIPSY HAUNTS

Let the blow fall soon or late,
Let what will be o'er me;
Give the face of earth around
And the road before me.
Wealth I seek not, hope nor love,
Nor a friend to know me;
All I seek, the heaven above
And the road below me.

R. L. STEVENSON

000 PADAGODA, thanks to coastal accessibility, was a flourishing hamlet. Hambantalawa, an extensive parkland five miles east of it, was apparently a paradise for hunters; and thither the gipsies, who had preceded us by a couple of days, had gone; we now despaired of meeting them.

The Gal Oya flows two miles north of Padagoda. It may seem incredible, nevertheless it is sober truth, that not until we came to Padagoda were we able to learn the name of a single village beyond the river, so effectual a barrier did it provide, directing traffic towards the prosperous east rather than the arid north. Forest folk do not travel far from their homes; a ten-mile radius is their ambit. The Moors, on the other hand, penetrate to the farthest interiors carrying commodities suited to the simple needs of the villagers. It is difficult to picture what the condition of the jungle dwellers would be but for the itinerant Moors—these ships of the Vanni. Much has been said against their extortionate methods; but let those only who possess their energy and enterprise be their critics.

The approach to the Gal Oya was a bad business; the rains had beset the path with marshes and running streams, and waked to activity innumerable leeches and scores of poisonous, russet *karawalas* of a colour with the sodden leaves. We almost walked into a cobra swallowing a young hare. In the jungle there is more to be feared from such hidden deaths than from great beasts.

Our practice was to secure a guide from village to village; but he whom Padagoda provided was a feckless, pot-bellied pigmy no more capable of leading us across the swollen river than a tadpole. Nor did our troubles end with the crossing. For two miles beyond we wallowed in flooded marshes; where snake-birds curvetted joyously, we splashed along under the quizzical eyes of securely perched eagles.

Wavinna was inundated and deserted; but here, on a rise amidst a cattle byre, was the inevitable Moor—sharing his dinner with myriads of flies; the necessary movements of his hands in conveying food to his mouth alone prevented his swallowing more flies than rice.

In a cassava field at Paragahakelle we occupied a leaf-walled hut rife with families of enormous centipedes, a bite from one of which would easily kill a child. Every now and then a shriek in the dark told of

[p.52]

000 some unfortunate who had trodden on a wriggling thing. We learnt too late that we had over-shot the game *talawas* of Wavinna by four miles. There was nothing for it, but to plough back through the mud at five the following morning, and to return at ten with a fine buck greatly to the joy of our dispirited company.

Veddas were my quest. Wherever I went, whomever I met, my one question was, "Are there any Veddas hereabout?" So far I had no luck.

A tall slouching man, obliging to obsequiousness, was the *aratchi* of Paragahakelle. He it was who first told me, as he escorted us the next morning, that good Veddas were to be found up north at Galmede. Years ago an illness took him there in search of a famous *vedarala*[*] who one day said to him, "Let us go and see the Veddas." He found them in caves, clothed in leaf and beaten bark, grinding *kurrakkan* and maize with fragments of stone. They stank superbly, and averred that if they poured water on their heads they would surely die. But that was twenty years ago. Would we find them so to-day? The Veddas of Galmede became an obsession and a hope.

101 Reaching Hinimidurawa that evening the *aratchi* also told us that across the field were people who called themselves Veddas. Even as he spoke one of these joined us. Shifting his gaze from our guns to the fresh spoor of an elephant, he said, "That brute will certainly kill us one day; we cannot escape him. All last night he had me up that tree in the *chena*. A few weeks ago he pulled down one of our huts killing a man and his son." He suggested we might hunt the beast.

"Where is he now?" I asked.

"I drove him that way last night," he said, indicating the direction of our proposed camp. This was not reassuring; the ravages of the animal were in evidence everywhere.

000 We settled down for the night by a stream that intersected the path. Large fires were lit and the men asked leave to sing, for it was not safe to be voiceless in the feeding grounds of so notorious a 'rogue'. Even as the forest echoed to lewd snatches, we heard the challenge. Having arranged for an all-night watch we were soon asleep. I was roused at midnight by a blowing sound quite close to me. The fires had died out and no one was awake! Groping in the dark I tugged at the first human leg I touched, but it was quite a while before its owner awoke, yawned—and grasped the situation. Then for ten minutes the forest rang to an uproar that might have scared a demon. The next morning, traces in the sand revealed the story. Lying as we were full in the path of the elephant, it had come to within ten yards of us on its nightly visit to the *chena*; then, suddenly changing its mind, it had turned away. It was well I woke when I did.

[115] 751 Heenbanda, a Vedda of Hinimidurawa, illustrated, from personal experience, the potency of a charm he gave us: Coming suddenly on a she-bear with cubs, he had shouted his charm as she rushed at him. The animal was hurled back, spread-eagled, as if struck. Recovering, she advanced again, and this time clasped the unfortunate man by the neck with her fore legs, while with her hind paws she ripped his abdomen; marks of which encounter he still carried. Heenbanda's brother who

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[*] Native physician.

5: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda

Gypsies E15
Ceylon

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A group of gipsies (Page 54)

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The gipsy javelin thrower. (Page 54)

[facing p. 54]

Gypsies E15
Ceylon

V
751 accompanied him, now struck the bear with his axe and, when she turned on him, killed her. So much for charms; excellent things—provided a weapon is in your hands. "Trust in God," says the Arabic proverb, "but fasten thy camel securely."

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361 Uhana was a surprise; the place gave every promise of being in a few years a flourishing settlement, thanks to Government grants of land, cattle and grain on easy terms. Luck at last! Near Uhana was a gipsy camp. Wadinagala gave us first promise of these people; but like a mirage they had faded from stage to stage of our journey, leaving only their camp refuse to mock us. Now, here they were, within two miles of us. We stayed over the next morning that we might visit them. As we neared their encampment we met a man who told us that he had passed them on their way to another camp. They who had been here for weeks must needs pack and begone within an hour of our visit! They were bound, the man said, for a place a mile and a half away. We followed, but did not find them there; instead, was another tantalizer who assured us that we would find them on a knoll by a stream a mile and a half beyond. We proceeded, painfully aware that every step of our way must be retraced in the broiling sun before we could earn our lunch. Disappointment again! Almost tearful with frustration and fatigue, we had thrown ourselves down, when a kindly individual came to our aid.

"Rest here," he said. "I shall go forward and see. Come if you hear me 'hoo.' I can tell of their presence some distance away by the crowing of their cocks and the clatter of their camp." We waited and were rewarded.

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[492] [231] [343] On an undulant opening, reminiscent of Somerset pastures, we found the gipsies. They had just unloaded their pack-bulls and were setting up camp under the blazing sky of noon, disdainful of the shelter of the cool environing jungle—the very antithesis of Vedda ways. Cattle and fowls flecked the glade; boys led goats into the forest. Women, graceful as Dianas, were erecting talipot shelters over collected household goods and communal stacks of grain. Tall men, lithe and sinewy as greyhounds, with mongrels at their heels, carried naked babes. Children, reading favour in our faces, essayed shrill nasal choruses clapping arms to chest. The chief, a quietly curious, grizzled man, with a care-free air bred of the freedom and independence of his life, held in play a vicious cobra just captured. He summed the gipsy life in a sentiment savouring of Borrow: "What are we?" he said. "Children of the open ways, bronzed by the sun, soaked by the rain, born on the trail, buried on the trail. That is our life." They had a sambur spear among them, and apparently only one man adept in its use; but that spear, their little dogs and their own untiring sinews were match enough for any sambur once started.

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361 From Uhane to Kotelinda by way of hill-girdled Bokkebedda in the drenching rain. Here, at a glance, we noticed crude little Vedda huts amidst those of the Sinhalese villagers. We were now among the hills of Madana long famed for Veddas; but to-day their caves are only tenanted by bears. Up to now we had traversed a stretch of country designated on the maps Maha-Veddi-Ratta (Great Vedda Country)—an empty name of about as much significance at the present time as the term Cinnamon Gardens applied to Colombo. Kotelinda lies in the centre of a region that is to-day the last stronghold of the Veddas—that

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Gypsies E15
Ceylon

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Gipsy Chiefs

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Young Gipsy Mothers

[Facing p 55]

triangle bounded on the south by the Gal Oya: on the west by the 131
Bibile-Batticaloa road: and on the east by the coast road. Within this
space are found the Veddas of Danigala, Henebedda and Bingoda,
besides the few about Kotelinda, Divulana and Serangamadu. If to 101
this tract were added that to the west and north of the Bibile-Batticaloa road, between it and the Mahaweli-ganga, we shall have embraced the Veddas of Bintenne, Gunner's Quoin, and other scattered settlements, and accounted for every Vedda extant—a mere handful of people in all.

Kaurala of Kotelinda was the first Vedda worthy of the name we had 115
encountered on this long journey. He was a Bingoda Vedda of the 823
Morana *waruge*, but had spent most of his days at Bandaradua now
derelict. He lived with his family in a crude hut in the jungle; his sole [411]
weapons were an axe, a bow and arrows. He was a simple soul, laughing
uproariously at one moment, and the next assuming that troubled gravity [157]
so characteristic of his race. He knew every inch of his jungles; there was no tree, stream, or stone once passed which he could not instantly recognise again. This instinct and the sun were his sole means of orientation. We tried to press him into service, but he refused. "How can I come?" he said, tossing head and arms like a windmill. "I am a lone man. I live in the jungle. I am only a Vedda. If I go, who is there to look after my children? See here, now," pointing to the damaged trees about his hut; "this is what the *botukandas** have done. How can I come?"

Our deviation to Kotelinda was in vain. We had hoped to cut across 000
the hills of Madana to Galmede; but the path had long been absorbed into the forest. We had therefore to double back to Bokkebedda, and thence strike north, through Gonagalla, to Divulana. With our usual ill-luck on this trip, we caught our fifth thunderstorm. It dropped plumb on us and worried us all the way; while in the unscathed beyond, over the treed parkland, the sunset wrought a panorama of opal and pearl, touching to glory the austere peak of Friar's Hood, queen of the distant hills.

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*Elephants.

3. A VEDDA OF DIVULANA

000 DIVULANA was recompense for our toil. The irrigation bungalow, placed high above the bund, over-looked the beautiful hill-encircled tank, whose glassy surface was broken by stones and snags on which cormorants and darters sunned.

115 Two miles within the forest lived Naga-Kauwa, a witless dwarf of
101 fifty, the sole Vedda of Divulana. Born in Kovil Vannami, he came as a
[732] child to the Rasagala caves, of which in their best day his people occupied
four or five. Now he and his family alone survived. Three years ago
161 he had abandoned cave life for that of the *chena*; and there we found him
amidst his cassava and the tender teak he nursed for a consideration
from Government.

431 His stalwart sons—quite unlike the father—brought us some yams, a
534 mouse deer and a primitive drum—the broken-off rim of an earthen pot
covered with wanderoo skin and fitted with a taut fibre.

342 Kauwa's hut was a thing to behold. The Tamils had said, "See
Kauwa, this is the way to build a house"; and Kauwa had built this
crazy thing a child of twelve might have bettered. The thatch was a
medley of dry grass and bark; the walls were of wattle, which stuck out
untrimmed through the roof, and bark slats so poorly fitted together that
there was more aperture than cover. The structure was no more than
four-foot square and two-storied at that; merely a covered
trestle three feet off the ground. In the lower floor his wife and children
lay huddled like rats; on the upper, its irregularities smoothed with
bundles of rush (primary elements of a mat), the lord and master slept.
Such was the caveman's first attempt at fashioning an abode. By the
[372] entrance was a fireplace, and, scattered about, were the bones of monkeys
and monitor lizards and the carapaces of tortoises that had served for
302 food. Stuck in the roof was a broken comb of buffalo horn, true touch
of civilisation, for the test of a real Vedda is that his hair must be stranger
to a comb.

115 Getting information from Kauwa was like squeezing water out of a stone; he could no more describe the simplest thing than he could fly. Still, patience does much and this is what we gleaned:

262 Tortoises and pangolins are considered good eating by the Veddas;
825 but the porcupine they abhor, calling it a *rodiya* among beasts, and only
killing it to give to their dogs. Why Veddas never eat porcupine I have
not been able to ascertain; it is said that, in the old lawless days, they
would go the length of burning down a Sinhalese hut in which they
discovered a porcupine being cooked. Pork they love because it clears the
blood, and one or two pigs a month the Vedda must have. Venison
causes itching and is not so good!

262 Vedda cookery, simple in the extreme, can still boast some tasty dishes:
252 *Gona-perume* is a sausage consisting of alternate layers of sambur meat
and fat. *Le-perume* is the same, with the addition of a third layer of
251 blood-clot. *Goa-thel-perume* is made by skinning the monitor's meaty

tail through a dorsal slit, partially separating the muscle mass from the 252
caudal vertebrae, and introducing into the space thus formed strips of 262
fat from the animal's flank; the skin is then sewn over with bast strip
and thorn, and the stuffed tail is roasted on embers and eaten forthwith, 251
or smoked and put by for future use.

262 Young hornbills being full of fat are a special Vedda delicacy; nor is the helpless imprisoned mother spared. Even more cruel is the treatment by these merciless epicures of the young of the edible-nest swiftlet. I asked Kauwa what he did with these when out nesting. "Eat them," he said; "the eggs are small but tasty; and so are the young which cry 'ki-ki-ki' as we put them in the fire."

251 The Vedda custom of preserving venison in honey is well known. This is how it is done: Into a hollow in a rock a little honey is poured; to this is added a few pieces of venison cut up small (pork is unsuitable as the fat prevents permeation); more honey is then poured on, and more meat added; and so layer by layer, till honey and meat are well intermingled. A protecting slab is then placed over the mouth of the hole.

752 Boa fat is said to be good for fractures; the broken limb being wrapped in *riti* bark or cloth saturated with the heated oil. They say it takes a month and a half for a fracture to heal; and in this, show more good sense than certain credulous Sinhalese who assure one that their *vedaralas* can cure a fracture in the time it takes a pot of rice to boil!

777 Kauwa had many charms against wild beasts. The one for buffaloes made them bleed from mouth and nose and fall dead! If you saw a bear you should *think* the appropriate charm and tie a knot in your hair; only if the animal attacked should you shout the words. For the leopard, he had no charm: "Cha, what's the use of that," he said; "the animal is more frightened of us than we of him."

773 Of Vedda heroes, there was Yapal whose voice could be heard a hundred miles; and Balagala-seya whose arm was like a tree, who carried a bow the girth of a man's thigh, and whose arrow would go through anything; in yonder Balagala rock he lived.

764 Their dead they cover with leaves and abandon where they die, or deposit in shallow graves covered over with earth and thorns to keep the pigs away.

515 Kauwa never bathed; he confirmed the assertion by rubbing rolls of dirt off his abdomen. "Does your wife not complain," we asked. "If she did," was the characteristic reply, "I would strike her with my axe-head, and ask her why she did not think of that when she came to me."

Vedda nuptials are not burdened with ritual: A prospective husband, 583
having gained the consent of the girl's parents, returns a few days later,
it may be with a friend, and perhaps a monitor or two. Placing his
bow and arrows on the roof of the hut, he enters. All partake of the 585
feast of lizards and yams; the girl, seated next to her man, doles out
his food, not partaking of a morsel until he has fed, and she has given
him a chew of betel and water to wash his hands. The man usually 591
throws in his lot with his father-in-law, but sometimes he takes the girl
away, leaving a couple of arrows behind in exchange. The girl's parents
may accompany them some distance saying by way of adieu, "Take
our child and keep her well." In custom we may differ from these wild
and simple folk, but in affection and solicitude are one.

[Facing p.58]

"Kauwa's hut was a thing to behold." (Page 55)

291 When Kauwa was young his people wore threshed *riti** bark suspended
[287 from the waist by a *riti* strip. A Vedda belle would sometimes trick
824] herself out in such adornments as a *riti* collar sewn at the back with
nuga† fibre, anklets of red ixora blooms, lotus petals in ear lobes and as
301 garlands round neck and loins, and circlets of strung wild jasmine round
the hair knot. Difficult, though it be, to reconcile this picture with
the wretched specimens one meets to-day, it must be admitted that
Kauwa had no imagination to run loose. An old song tells of Vedda
maidens whose heads were adorned with peacock plumes.

844 Vedda man and wife usually walk the forest together, and accouchements often occur away from home and female assistance; the man then
846 does duty for midwife by placing the woman with her back to a rock
and two stones to her feet. For nine days after child-birth he feeds her
262 only on *gonala* yams and the flesh of monitors.

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* *Antiaris toxicaria.*

† *Ficus altissima*

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Kaurala and his wife. (Page 55)

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A Galmede home. (Page 60)

[Facing p. 59]

4. FRIAR'S HOOD AND THE VEDDAS OF GALMEDE

ACCOMPANIED by Kauwa and a Tamil, we left Divulana to enter upon 000
the wildest part of our journey. The *illuk* glades, so familiar to us for
many days, now gave place to jungle sunless, forsaken, virginal and silent
save for the cry of a cicala or the rustle of a jungle cock or chevrotan.

Crossing the Amankelle Oya we came to the deserted home of the 361
Bandaradua Veddas—Kauwa's old home. It outlay a glade in full view
of the Bandaradua rock. All that now marked the place were a cadju
tree, that spread its branches in a great canopy, and a few live fence 515
sticks all overgrown with *pussela-wel*, the pounded bark of which the 424
Veddas soak in water rendering it soapy for cleansing their lousy heads.

Late in the evening we were at the foot of Friar's Hood, that loneliest 000
of Ceylon's forest hills, the landmark of the old Portuguese mariners.
The environing jungle was sinister with the menace of unseen things.
Here our guide had once encountered a gang of no less than six bears,
and indicated to us the very trees up which he and his companion had
shinned. It was not the sort of place one would care to be in alone;
and yet, in a clearing by the rock, a Moor had recently lived with his
wife for three years, growing amidst his cassava a deadlier plant,* the
joy and bane of Eastern lands.

We camped on this deserted plantation. As it darkened a sambur belled and stamped around us in high dudgeon that his accustomed pasturage had been usurped. The hooded peak before us melted into the gloom, only to stand out again under the stars more sinister and secret than ever. This lonely outlaw, standing away from the herded hills, had survived a race of men. It was there when the first paleolithic ancestors of the Veddas crossed from India, when Ceylon and that land were one. Towards it, and the security it afforded, was the best remnant of that race gradually driven by succeeding waves of civilisation through the long years. To-day around it the last of the Veddas are dying. And yet,

> The hills are shadows and they flow
>   From form to form, and nothing stands;
> They melt like mists, the solid lands,
>   Like clouds they shape themselves and go.

It is difficult to say where Galmede really begins. We must ascribe 103
to it all that tract of deserted *chenas*, with their crumbling Vedda shelters 361
and *mora* forests devastated by elephants, between Friar's Hood and the
Magalawatavan Oya, on the other bank of which stand the few huts
that comprise the Galmede of to-day. This place, the port of our dreams,
we entered with beating hearts.

The first individual to meet us was no Vedda at all but a Chetty! 361

"Where are the Veddas?" I asked eagerly.

"There are no Veddas here," he said.

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*Cannabis indica.

[p.59]

361 " But surely there are Veddas in Galmede ; everybody told us so," I insisted.

" Veddas of a sort, yes," was the reply ; " and perhaps among them, one or two good ones ; but the best live away in the caves, in those rocks yonder. Now if you'd come yesterday you'd have seen two of them who brought me some *goas* in exchange for betel and tobacco."

000 Disappointment melted into sudden hope. So, there were real Veddas still left. But oh ! these people. Was ever chase so disheartening? Always the promise, never the fulfilment. Were we chasing phantoms of the wilderness, mocking spirits of a dead race, intolerant of the intrusion on their tranquil sepulchres ?

There was no possibility of visiting the cave-Veddas that day. So I decided to stay over and visit them the next morning, travelling across the pathless hills to the high road; while my companion,—fed up to the teeth by now at the very mention of the word Vedda, and in a bad way with festering tick-bites, heat exhaustion, and lack of fresh food—tried to dissuade me from an adventure that promised no success. But I was bent on it. So we agreed that most of the bearers should accompany him to Maha Oya by an easier route, while I remained behind with three men and a two days' ration of tinned food.

With nightfall my prospect of securing a guide to the Galmede hills was no nearer than in the morning. The only man who could be relied on was down with fever. I was seated disconsolately in the Chetty's garden after dinner, close to a chatting group, when suddenly I saw a shadow slip in out of the darkness and join them ; there was some whispering ; " Ah, is this the man they call Meenemaruwa ?* " I heard
648 one of my bearers ask.

241 " Yes, I am he they call murderer, rogue and everything besides." The answer came loud and unabashed from the man himself.

115 Rumour had spoken of him as far away as Kotelinda ; and it had not spoken kindly. He lived three miles up the river by himself, inspiring the neighbourhood with awe of him. He was in a quandary that night. Returning home after a short absence, he had found that his brother had been taken into custody for illicit *chena* cultivation. He waxed eloquent on his wrongs, while the others listened : " Now what I want to know," he said " is why they should have taken my brother, who is a fool and cannot say a word in his defence, when they might have taken me ? No, they wouldn't do that because I can talk. My brother cultivated the *chena* it is true, but it was I who gave it to him ; the land is mine. They want me to pay taxes, I who am a Vedda ! My grandmother was a
[826 Vedda of Veddas, you should have seen her. How well I remember the
789] piece of human liver she carried in her betel-bag. We children would take it from her and want to throw it away ; she would pluck it from us, saying, ' Hu, what do you want with this, isn't it mine ? ' Io, why do they treat me like this ? Someone is angry with me. It must be the *aratchi*. No, the *aratchi* is good to me ; he and I are friends. Now *Hettyar*, what must I do ? I must go to the courts myself and get a petition drawn." Thus he talked interminably, while I wondered how a Vedda could come to argue like a lawyer.

"Now leave all that aside," I interrupted, "and tell me how I am to see these Veddas of the rocks tomorrow."

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*Murderer.

115 He left the group and seated himself before me—a sinewy, handsome, bearded man of perhaps forty.

114 "Those Veddas," he said contemplatively, when I told him how we stood; "who can say where they are? In one cave to-day, in a another to-morrow. They said they came from Dhik-galge, did they? But you can never take a Vedda's word for that. If they are not there—what then? All our trouble will be in vain. I cannot say I know the caves in those hills very well. I have only been among them once, and that many years ago, when I took my wife from her people. She and I wandered about there. How well she knew the trails, she who had trodden them but once as a little child; for her home, like mine, was elsewhere. I would see a track and point to it saying, 'This must be the way to the cave.' 'No,' she would say 'that leads to the wilderness; there should be a path by that tree yonder'; and she would always be right. I remember well the *kong* tree by the Alu-galge; I shot two monkeys and we ate them there." And so his thoughts rambled amid honey-moon scenes he loved to recall.

But, as this meandering led nowhere, I offered a reward of five rupees to anyone who would show me the Veddas in their caves on the morrow, and took to bed. For long I lay pondering what manner of man was the Chetty who could live in this wilderness with a Vedda woman for wife. He seemed to know intimately every Vedda in the district, and had sometimes even shared their caves. He remained an enigma, as also that smile of his, no more than a mere display of the teeth, which imbued the knit, pathetic cast of his features with an expression whether of saintliness or villainy, it was hard to tell. Ostensibly he was here to rear cattle; but why come so far for that?

114 The next morning, accompanied by Meenemaruwa, the Chetty and a half-Vedda of Galmede, we set out on our quest. The plan was this; we were to travel to a spot where a certain stream crossed the path: there we would probably find foot-prints; if these led to the hills we would follow, if in the opposite direction, pursuit would be useless, as that would imply that the Veddas had returned to their homes in Bingoda fifteen miles away; for at this season the Veddas did not live in their caves, and the party we were in search of must have come on a few days hunting. I now understood the reticence of these people to take me on what might prove a wild goose chase; and learnt, what was more important, that the Veddas of Galmede were the Veddas of Bingoda.

We came to the stream; the foot-prints were there. Our guides bent down eagerly examining them. "This is Suthubanda's," they said "and this Badapissa's; this other is a woman's; no, it's a boy's." The tracks pointed towards the hills! The chase began.

114 360 487 Meenemaruwa led, for he alone could decipher that trail, three days old, on the hard dry ground. Once we left the stream there was apparently not the faintest indication of a foot-mark; but our guide moved rapidly along, and soon involved us in an enforested labyrinth of hills. Very occasionally a broken twig would furnish a clue. Indicating one of these Meenemaruwa said, "Now, that would never have been done had old Handuna been alive. 'Hu,' he would have said, slapping the errant one, 'do you want to show everybody the way to our caves; then where would we go if people came after us?' To the rock, the cave and the hive there must be no clue; that is the Vedda law.

114 Even a Vedda child should be able to pick its way through the jungle
487 with no mark to guide it."

We had travelled thus a long while, and for all I knew had lost all
361 trace of the Veddas, when we struck a stream where the foot-prints of
342 a man and a dog were evident. Soon we were climbing up to Dhik-galge,
114 to find, alas! that not only was it deserted, but that no Veddas had been
near it for many a long day. The Veddas had lied to the Chetty!

The cave we found ourselves in was a magnificent one—long, spacious and open to the sky, with tall straight trees towering before it. Below, a stream babbled over rocks, making delightful bathing pools. Around, was the tenderest music of birds. It was a romantic spot, specially designed, as it were, by Nature for the jungle-dweller. The dome of the cave was covered with crude drawings. A broken pot had been put in a niche. There were fragments of filthy rag, a large cooking frame and dry leaves which had long previously been slept upon. The rocky floor was smooth in places where *kurrukkan* had been rubbed to flour with flat worn stones, and cupped where maize had been pounded. The *aratchi* of Paragahakelle had spoken true. A handful of moss, peeping from a crevice, revealed, when disturbed, a couple of fledglings. Our first thought was that they were young swiftlets, left there to die by ruthless nest-hunters; but they flew too strongly for that; and soon, the piteous cries of the parent birds told us that we had inadvertently rifled a fly-catcher's nest.

It was mid-day, and, being very tired, we sat down to a meal; I to
114 camp-pie and chocolate, the others to raw cassava. Our hunger abated, I reminded our guides that my offer of a reward still stood, and that he would get it, who brought me up with even one of those Veddas wherever he might be. Asking us to stay where we were, Meenemaruwa and the half-Vedda of Galmede vanished into the jungle.

The better part of an hour must have elapsed when we heard the latter calling to us excitedly. He said that Meenemaruwa was in hot pursuit of the Veddas who, to judge by their traces, were making away at great speed, evidently scared by the sight of my shoe-prints.

222 Following at a run, we eventually came upon them—a wild, swarthy
224 group of two men and two boys, freighted with the spoils of the chase;
each with his sackful of edible bird's nests, dried sambur meat and
482 *bambara* honey; the leaders with two old muzzle-loaders. May the
142 picture not fade. Suthubanda was there, and the youth Badapissa as
609 our sleuths had told us. But the figure that arrested my fancy most
was a wild, fiery-eyed, shaggy-haired fellow of twenty-five—an ebon Apollo. Gama he was called because he was born on a journey (*gamana*). To his waist was attached the inflated bladder of the sambur they had killed. Nor did his looks belie his character, for, even as we came up,
[578] he flared into foul-mouthed fury at a tired, inoffensive boy of their
company.

They were delighted with the tobacco and betel we shared out to them, and gave us honey in return. Money they refused. When we asked them how it was that they had not been in Dhik-galge as they had said they were, their only answer was a hearty laugh!

600 It was hail and farewell! for the hour was past noon, and the Veddas had many miles to make before nightfall; so had we. But those shadows of the spangled forest were soon to call me again.

115 578 Meenemaruwa accompanied us a little way, singing Vedda songs with the voice of a priest chanting *bana*. I told him he had the throat of a drongo, which pleased him immensely. He explained, that as a boy he had been taken in hand by Buddhist priests who "straightened" his throat.

"Why are you called Murderer?" I asked.

"There was a man in our village," he said "whose wife abused everybody. I remonstrated with her, and her husband resented my interference, and bore ill-feeling towards me." (Rumour said that his relations with the woman were not quite as detached as he made out). "One day I was walking through an *illuk* field with a gun I had borrowed from a Moor, when I saw this man and two others coming towards me. The path was narrow; but who were they that I should make way for them or anyone else? This was twenty years ago, I was but a boy then. As we met, my enemy caught me by the neck and shoved me aside, and the two others struck me. I saw the devil then, and, placing my gun to the man's chest, fired; he dropped. A spark flew into my eye and, prevented my shooting the others as they ran. When I saw what I had done I went away and hid in the jungle. The first night I spent on a trestle where I used to watch for sambur; four drank at the water that night, but I had not the heart to shoot one. For a year I wandered in the forests, a hunted man, only creeping out occasionally at night to beg a little food or powder. Eventually, tiring of the life and hearing that the man I had shot had partially recovered, I sent word that I would give myself up. The *aratchi* who came to arrest me was afraid to approach me. I placed my gun aside and gave him my hands; as he clapped the manacles on there were tears in his eyes. I spent five years in various jails in the Island, seeing many places and learning much wisdom. That was many years ago; cha, I am getting older now." He left us happy with his morning's work and his well-earned reward.

The Chetty of Galmede escorted me to Maha Oya the next day where ODV my friend , now quite refreshed, awaited me. Some hours after our arrival, I was recounting to the Chief Headman of the place, our two weeks experiences all the long and devious way from Siyambala Anduwa, when my mention of the Chetty's name suddenly electrified him.

"He came with you here, did you say?" he asked, starting up. "Then he is here now. *Aratchi*, go quick and get him. That's the man I have been wanting these two years. He's the greatest scoundrel in the Province; there are any number of writs against him; but he lives on the borders of two Provinces, and when I send my men to take him, he merely crosses over to the other side, defies them to capture him if they dare and sends back insolent messages to me. The man you call Meenemaruwa is another of his sort. If only I can get them."

That night we were dining with the Chief when a man sent a message asking if he might see him. It was the Chetty; now hand-cuffed, alas! He said something to the Chief in a whisper, and smiled that enigmatic smile of his. Was it a saint's or a scoundrel's? This time there was no doubt, for he had offered to betray his *ganja* growing accomplices among the poor half-Veddas of Galmede, as the price of his liberty.

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Suthu Banda, Gama and their families. (Page 65)

[facing p.64]

CHAPTER VI

VEDDAS OF BINGODA

I. BINGODA HOMES

Innumerable years had flown,
Since first the chisel in her hand
Necessity, the sculptor, took,
And in her spacious meaning planned
These forms, and that eternal look.
L. Binyon

197 [101] Concede me three points and I shall attempt to show that there exist in Ceylon to-day Veddas worthy of the name. Language, apparel and weapons are the concessions I ask.

Let us begin by confessing, that the Veddas we shall tell of have no
pure language of their own, but merely a patois, in which Sinhalese words
predominate and Vedda words are few ; their clothing is not the traditional
291 leaf or threshed *riti* bark, but fragments of foul rag affording, if anything,
less cover ; the weapons they favour are guns (of a type almost as
411 dangerous to user as to quarry) and not bows and arrows which they
employ only in sore necessity.

Vital issues, you will say, which should deprive this people of their name. But language, dress and arms may change without materially altering, for a time at least, ancient customs and primeval instincts.

101 The word Vedda originally meant hunter ; and a people supreme in jungle-craft, always capable of gleaning from the unfriendly forests a sufficiency for their needs and utterly incompetent to husband even the primitive agriculture of the *chena*, has surely a claim to the name.

224 It must not be supposed that every Vedda possesses a gun ; far from it ;
occasionally there may be a single weapon to a whole clan. The usual
[411] thing is for the Sinhalese or Moors to lend their guns to these superb
[427] trackers, who never waste a shot and seldom return without their quarry,
a large share of which goes by agreement to the owner of the gun.

114 Of my first accidental meeting with these Veddas amid the hills of Galmede, I have already told. Barely four months had elapsed before I found myself renewing their acquaintance ; this time with set purpose.

Arriving at the forest village of Mullegama, sacred to Buddhists, and abounding in lime groves and Moors, I was fortunate enough to run up against my friend Kaurala of Kottelinde, who, so difficult of acquisition before, now became our willing guide.

131 Bingoda, the home of our Veddas, is some three miles from Mullegama, and lies on the Dhungulla Oya, a tributary of the Magalavatan Aar which connects Bingoda with Galmede, ten miles away—all in the circuit of

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[582]
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Wedded children. (Page 65)

Kaira and his wife. (Page 65)

[facing p.65]

these Veddas. Bingoda is not all Vedda; essentially it is a Sinhalese 131 *chena* village of about six or eight families, within a stone's throw of which are the crude huts belonging to the few surviving Veddas. Through 361 a tangle of overgrown scrub we reach them; they are not so numerous that we cannot easily name every single Vedda there.

Three we have met before, Suthubanda, Gama and Badapissa; it 101 was they who led us such a chase at Galmede. In the first hut we find the swarthy Gama and his comely young wife Kalu—his fifth experiment 162 in matrimony: and he barely twenty-five! Not far from this is Suthu- [587] banda's abode, in which are his wife, the skinny Thuthi, mother by previous marriage of Gamma; their two little boys, Handuna and Naida and girls Kumi and Punji. Handuna is the quaintest brat imaginable; 855 he is ash-coloured from top to toe, through crouching by the hearth all night to keep warm his naked body; for, all he has for cover is a little strip of loin cloth drooping erratically from a slack waist-string that sags well below his nates; his rotund abdomen accommodates an enormous [164 spleen; with hands crossed over shrugged shoulders to keep the chill 516] away. He gazes quizzically at you.

Away from these two homes, across the stream, is the only other Vedda 361 hut. Unlike those of Suthubanda and Gama which are of wattle and [184 daub, this is a sadly dilapidated mud structure once occupied by a Moor. It is the most pathetic and curious menage here, and belongs to Kaira 342] brother of Suthubanda. His wife Randunna, a hideous squint-eyed thing, is mother by a previous husband to Heenthuthi the twelve-year 101 old wife of Badapissa (Muthua), Kaira's younger brother! A more 161 ridiculous pair it would be hard to find: the wife a mere child, the husband barely more. The Veddas favour such early marriages, saying that, [582] growing up thus together, the two learn to love each other well. Be that as it may, it does seem a most piteous travesty of human matings. Huddled by the hearth and shivering with ague, is old Thanthi mother of the clan, and wife of the dead chief Neela. And, lastly, we have here the most pathetic figure in all Bingoda—Kummi, a girl of fifteen, dust- [164] besmeared, ulcerated, crippled, and so scantily clad that she is ashamed to stand lest she reveal her nakedness. A misery to herself and others, she sits apart with face shyly lowered, taking timid glances every now and then, like some wild thing, from large black lustrous eyes that might have shone befittingly on the face of some proud beauty.

To these, though they now dwelt apart at Mullegama, we must add Kaurala and his family, for he too was of Bingoda, and is maternal uncle of Suthubanda. By his two wives, Balli and Ranni, he has four little sons, Kaira Vanniya, Heratha, Kalua and Sela; and two daughters, Ranni and Dingi.

These details, though perhaps tedious, serve to bring out vividly the intimate inter-relationships of the Veddas, their apparent disregard of appearance or age in their choice of wives, the promiscuity of life in their one-roomed homes—mother, child and father all lying huddled together [595 in a little space. For all that it must not be assumed that Veddas are 586] devoid of a moral code. A man may have more than one wife, it is true; and, if it pleases him, he may cast her aside like a worn garment; but to each man his own woman while she is his; that is the Vedda law which all respect.

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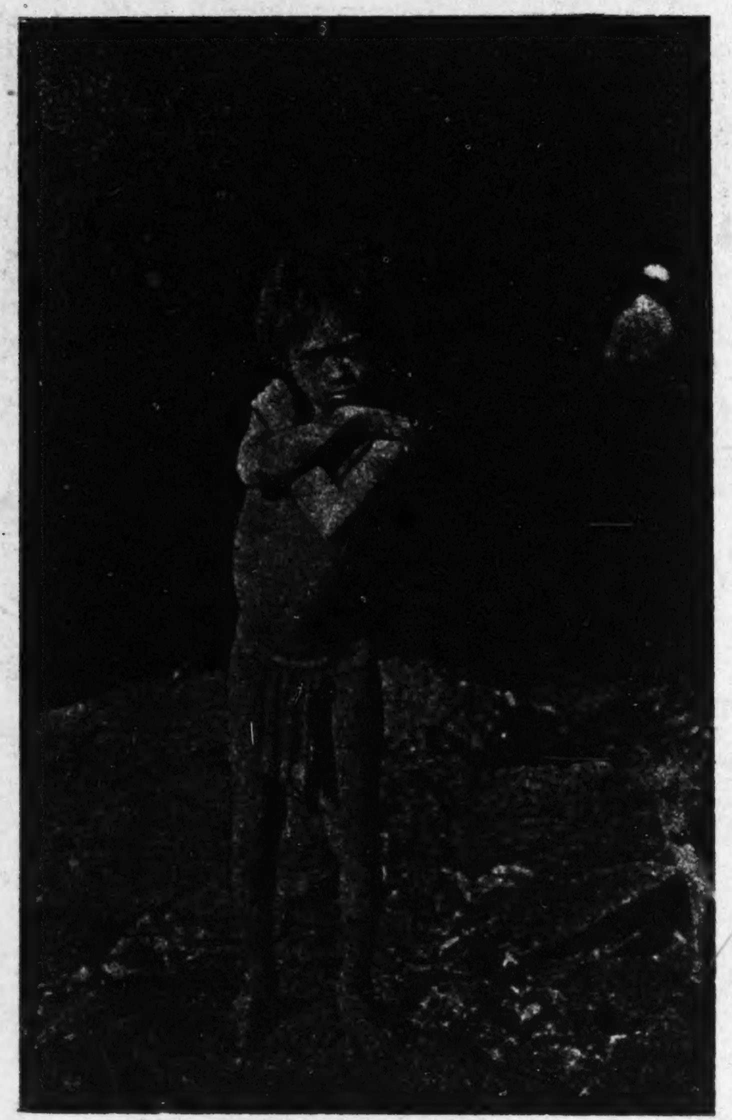

Little Handuna. (Page 65)

[Facing p. 66]

582 The correct Vedda marriage is that between the children of a brother
635 and sister. A marriage between children of two brothers or of two sisters
is regarded as incest. And here their standard is higher than ours.

587 Marriage for the Vedda is a very simple affair. Suthubanda, for
instance, espoused a widow in his household. When she was freed by
the death of her husband, it was right that he should take her, and he
made no demur, though she was old and ugly and he young and robust.
583 Kaurala went to the younger of his two wives with a length of cloth, a
bead necklace, a bangle and two hair pins, and brought her away. Gama,
whose wife was an orphan of Henebedde, did much the same. But
591 the rule is that a man should cast in his lot with his wife's people. Then,
the morning after marriage the pair go into the jungle and bring home,
it may be a *kanava* comb, a monitor lizard, or some yams, and thus the
common life begins.

585 The waist-string plays as important a part in Vedda matrimony as
291 does the ring in ours. When a woman has tied round the waist of a man
a string of her own twisting, he becomes her husband. This string, some
six encircling loops, lasting practically a life-time, is made of *niyande*
[283 (bow-string hemp), the long bayonet-shaped leaf of which is shredded
824] to fibre by being drawn repeatedly between the palm of the hand and a
bare branch.

586 Divorce is as informal as marriage; the woman being merely returned
to her parents or requested to go to whomsoever she chooses. But the
Vedda is not, as a rule, unreasonably capricious in the exercise of his
power; he has too great a sense of responsibility and of fair-play towards
the mother of his children and partner in his toil. A lad I knew blew
762 out his chest with a gun, from remorse at having taken to himself two
sisters who continually quarrelled with each other over his affections.

593 A Vedda will not hesitate to chastise his spouse when necessary;
but that, after all, is only a mark of affection! We saw one belabour
his wife unmercifully because she would not let him accompany us;
she took all the beating she got, but had her own way in the end.

551 These people do not address their women-folk by name. Ask a man to
name his children, and he will stutter and stumble at the task. A Vedda
515 hails his wife somewhat as follows: "What are you doing there?
Come here and break my head." This apparently suicidal request is
only his way of requesting her to perform the delightful uxorial duty
of cleansing his hair of vermin.

614 The Veddas of Bingoda claim to be of the Morana *waruge*, the best
Vedda clan. Those of Danigala, of the Unapane clan, come next. But
565 for the Veddas of Henebedde the Bingoda folk profess disdain, calling
515 them *Uro* (swine) and *Waliyo*, and saying it was their duty in old-time
to pour water on the Morana's hands when they had fed. How much
water these Moranas themselves use we have yet to learn; for, if the
saying be true, that the worse the odour the better the Vedda, then the
Veddas of Bingoda are aristocrats. What a thing is human nature
after all, when even this wretched little remnant of humanity, without a
rag to their bodies claim social precedence over each other?

614 There are nine Vedda clans or *waruges*; and each has its own story:

173 The Morana *waruge* was so called by a Sinhalese king who yearned for
the *mora* fruit when it was out of season, and had his want proclaimed.

The hut of Gama. (Page 65)

" Too ashamed to stand lest she reveal her nakedness." (Page 65)

[facing p. 67]

A Vedda woman, who had preserved bunches of the fruit in a pot of honey, 614
was able to provide them; and so earned the name of her tribe. The 173
Unapana *waruge*, like all the other *waruges*, also owed its name to a
woman. She, when a king was out hunting in a parched land, supplied
him with drink by squeezing out her dew-drenched cloth! Thirst
apparently destroys the fastidiousness even of kings. The Rugam
waruge derives from an incident connected with the building of the bund
of Rugam tank. After its completion, this earth-work used to break
down with the yearly floods despite all efforts at consolidating it. The
Sinhalese king of the time had a vision one night telling him, that if a
pregnant woman were built alive into the bund, it would ever after remain
intact. A Vedda woman was sacrificed, and her clan received the name
of the tank. The Uru *waruge* was called after a child-birth in a pig's
hole; the Tala *waruge* after such an episode in a *talawa* or glade; the
Nabudena, Kiribo and Embille *waruges* after similar occurrences under
nabudu, *kiribo* and *embille* trees respectively. The Veddas being nomadic [551]
these incidents are common. Gama, as we have seen, owed his name
to being born on the way (*gamana*).

Though shy and retiring by nature, Veddas are always to be found in 177
the vicinity of Sinhalese settlements; and that, for good reasons: Ceylon
being but a small island, its remotest forests are easily accessible; more 178
so in recent years when roads and railways have spread out their tentacles
everywhere claiming from Nature her wildest solitudes. Any jungles
that have not yet fallen a prey to planting enterprise owe it largely to
their aridity and unhealthiness. Nowhere is there a spot in Ceylon
to-day that is not within ten miles of some habitation. Besides, it is to
the mutual advantage of both Vedda and Sinhalese to be near each other,
for if the one can supply grain in days of dearth, the other can repay
tenfold with flesh and honey in season.

The Sinhalese affect an indulgent tolerance towards the Veddas,
and aver them to be more of a nuisance than a help, saying the
Veddas have to be kept alive when starving. The Vedda, on the
other hand, will tell you that he is never in want; for the jungle,
even in its worst months, is never totally devoid of food for
him who knows where to find it: *kanava* and *kotha* combs are always
there, and meat and yams of one sort or another. It must however
be admitted, that the Veddas have a great partiality for what the unaided
jungle cannot give—*kurrukhan*, maize, and tobacco. Rice is a welcome
occasional meal to the Vedda, but he cannot do without *kurrukhan*;
it takes much rice to fill the stomach, whereas a *kurrukhan* cake is like
a stone, and even a small piece satisfies.

A Sinhalese told us that if you gave a Vedda much by way of barter, [437]
he would never come near you again, but would go where the giving
was more niggardly. (What a salve to the conscience!) We asked a
Vedda if this was true: "Much they give us," he said; "though they
are always ready enough to take all we give them—and more."

In the bottom of their hearts the Veddas have a suspicion that the 161
Sinhalese wish them no good. A Vedda, when asked how it was that
their numbers had dwindled so, said, with simple faith, that it was due 186
to the Sinhalese having killed out his people, by giving them charmed 731
tobacco to eat, so that they died of disease or misadventure. The recent
influenza epidemic fairly wiped out the last of the Veddas.

2. VEDDA CHARACTERISTICS, RELIGION, AND SUPERSTITION

If 'tis not a true philosophy
That the spirit when set free,
Still lingers about its olden home,
In the flower and the tree,
It is very strange that our pulses thrill
At the sight of a voiceless thing,
And our hearts yearn so with tenderness
In the beautiful time of Spring.

N. P. Willis

241 **The** genuine Vedda is a quite incompetent agriculturist; that is a mark
181 by which you may know him; and none are more so than the Veddas
of Bingoda who can no more develop a *chena* than they can fly. They
will make a fine beginning; valiantly fell trees and sow grain; but there
it ends; whenever the mood seizes them they leave it all and go into the
forest, and the wild animals wander in. This is why I consider the Veddas
[184] of Bingoda the most primitive I have met; better even than the classical
Veddas of Henebedde and Danigala who are more of the agriculturist and
less of the hunter.

221 Though these Veddas live close to Sinhalese settlements, they spend a
large part of their time in the jungle. When the forests have much
222 to give—as in January and February, the good yam months, and June
177 and July, the honey and fruits months—the Veddas take their families
and forsake their huts for caves and stream-beds; here to-day, there
to-morrow. But in times of jungle impoverishment—March to May,
and September to December—they remain near the village, where at a
pinch they can beg a pittance of grain; but even then foraging parties
frequently wander forth and return in a few days with honey, flesh and
swiftlets' nests for barter.

144 There is, almost certainly, no Vedda to-day without some trace of
Sinhalese (or Tamil) blood in his veins; a reason why anthropometry
is so often arid of results; still, one can usually tell a Vedda from a
Sinhalese at a glance: The sparsity of hair on the Vedda's face is his
142 outstanding characteristic, in marked contrast to the heavily bearded
Sinhalese; add to this a darker complexion, a shorter stature, a greater
reserve, simplicity, and apathy, and an easily aroused ferocity of nature—
[826] and there is no more to be said. But Kaurala of Kotlinde would have
it there was a further distinction: "See," said he, placing my hand on
his Adam's apple. "I am a true Vedda; where is my throat-knot?"

181 Veddas are an independent folk. They are no respectors of persons;
and if you wish to know them, it does not do to stand on your dignity.
Displease them, and they will not come near you; treat them kindly
and they are your good friends. Childish and ingenuous to a degree,
they will address you on equal terms, and often show an embarrassing

181 576

familiarity savouring even of impudence and disrespect. But that is because they know no better. I have had a Vedda address me as "*tho,*" a word now used only towards a very inferior person. A Vedda once took my gun and cartridge-bag to shoot us something for dinner. He returned empty-handed and disgruntled. I inquired what ailed him.

"What sort of cartridges are these?" he said, throwing down the bag contemptuously. "You fire at a wanderoo, and he sits and grins at you. You fire again, and he grins the more. You want six or seven big shot for animals, not *kurrukkan* grains."

I asked him how he knew the size of the shot in my cartridges. He answered that he had looked inside. It was not until the next day that I realised the thoroughness of his investigation. Every single cartridge in the bag, some fifty or more, had its wad at a rakish tilt! When I upbraided him for the liberty, he disarmed my wrath by laughing uproariously.

On one occasion we had pitched our tent under a big tree which caught fire through the carelessness of our cook who had pursued his occupation by its foot. As I lay in bed ignorant of a blazing branch overhead, I was warned repeatedly by the carriers of the danger of my position; but to these anxieties my tiredness made me deaf. "After to-night," said a Vedda, "no devil will be able to return to Colombo!" The words were electrical in effect—and in good time too, for the branch fell just as the tent was dismantled.

The quaintness of the Vedda language is always a delight. Not knowing the art of dissembling, they say just what they think. They are capable of exquisite and spontaneous similes and metaphors. Vulgarity is natural to them, and their talk is interlarded with phrases that would make a navvy blush.

181 152

I have said that a Vedda laughed uproariously. Now, it has been stated repeatedly, by persons professing to know all about Veddas, that these people are incapable of laughter. The statements have even gone to grotesque lengths as the sub-joined extract testifies.* When a

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*THEY NEVER LAUGH

MOST SOLEMN TRIBES IN THE WORLD.

Laughter, and the faculty of being merry and bright, are gifts of the gods to a world in which there is not too much sunshine at any time.

But this gift, according to the scientists who know all about these subjects, has been denied to the Veddas, the aboriginal inhabitants of Ceylon. It is the only people in the world who never laugh, and in consequence they are thin and flabby folk, and a fat man among the Veddas would be an extraordinary sight for sad eyes. A traveller who has studied the early races in Ceylon gives some interesting particulars about this curious tribe.

For nearly 2000 years, according to the best chronicles, these people, now almost extinct, have preserved the same characteristics, and no one, so far as history reveals, has ever seen a smile on the face of one of them or heard a laugh while in their section of Ceylon.

Why these people do not smile is a mystery. They alone of all the people on the earth know nothing of the sensation of laughter.

A scientist, who recently journeyed to Ceylon for the purpose of investigating this question, persuaded some of them to permit him to tickle them in the ribs and in the middle of their feet with straws, and never caught even the flicker of a smile on their faces, nor did he ever succeed in making one of them squirm and laugh aloud during the operation.

(*Continued on next page*)

181 sophisticated Vedda knows what is expected of him he will act up to
152 the expectation right enough. Personally I have never yet met a Vedda who could not laugh. The truth is that the Vedda will laugh with the best of us when there is occasion; but he is a stranger to the conventional, hypocritical smile of civilisation, meant only to please and so uncertain an index of the heart. The Vedda's face, like a child's, is a mirror to his mind.

His natural expression is one of apathy and moroseness. Schooled to hardship and privation, he is neither greatly distraught by sorrow nor transported by joy He expresses his emotions with more moderation than we; he is the greater fatalist; and accepts with stoic equanimity the hard conditions of his life which have wrought into his expression a dour indifference, a decorous gravity.

There is something naturally fierce in his nature; and it does not do to anger him. The tradition is undoubtedly true that the Veddas, at one time, carried in their betel bags fragments of human liver which they chewed when roused, to give fire to their frenzy. And this is probably the origin of the Sinhalese threat, "I'll eat your liver!" There is a spot in the Eastern Province which commemorates to this [173] day an early incident of colonisation: A Vedda had once way-laid and killed a European soldier, and going up to him could hear the ticking of his watch; examining this he said, "His life is still here," and dashed it to pieces on a rock.

When a Vedda returns from an expedition no one must speak to him until he has rested and it has pleased him to talk first. One who had accompanied us once on a hunt nearly killed a Sinhalese boy who innocently asked him what he had brought, the moment he arrived. Most sportsmen, Vedda or not, are impatient of cross-examination when fatigued—especially if unsuccessful.

771 The Veddas have no conception of a supreme being; nor have they any myth or theory bearing on cosmogony. The panorama of the heavens is beyond their questioning; but its supremacy is instinctively avowed: "*Mā Suriya Deyyo*" (by the Sun God) is an oath by which
195 the Vedda vouches his good faith.

776 Like animals, concerned only with their immediate needs, they take the world very much as they find it. But if the aloof heavens leave their imaginations untouched, not so their immediate environment. Here exist real powers more within the pale of their comprehension, influencing every act of their lives, overshadowing their credulous minds, and affording at least some data on which to found a faith. Is it surprising then that they people Nature with sentient beings, unseen, but very evident by their acts. And what spirits more comprehensible to the primitive mind, more inspiratory of faith and fear, than those of one's

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Another strange thing about the Veddas, and one which may possibly be connected with their lack of humour, is the fact that every one of them is a George Washington, unable to tell a lie or to conceive of anyone else telling a lie.

They cannot even believe that any one would take the property of anyone else, and association with civilisation has failed to convince them that it is possible.

With all this—or, rather without all this—the Veddas are a peaceable, gentle, quiet people. They take wives without any marriage ceremony, and are faithful and constant to them, supporting them to death.

Aberdeen Paper, 1922

own departed; spirits, real and intimate, inhabiting like themselves 776
rock and tree and stream; human enough to pester or assist, to take vengeance if angered, and, if propitiated, tutelary over the Vedda's abodes. It is owing to the maliciousness of these spirits, and less from any fear of wild animals, that the Vedda is averse to travelling alone in the jungle; though, when necessity compels, he will do so, armed only with his little axe. Nor do they permit their women to adorn themselves too much for fear of attracting the *hetha* (devil).*

When a person dies it is the *hetha* that killed him; and the *hetha* of 761
the dead one remains by the corpse and haunts the vicinity for years. Hence the great fear these people have of their dead; a fear that sometimes makes them cover with leaves and abandon a dying person, be he or she their best beloved, lest their necks be squeezed; a fear that [768]
keeps them away for years from caves where deaths have occurred.

In the course of time the spirit of a dead person loses its individuality in a general spirit world, the spirits of the more recently dead, and therefore the better known to succeeding generations, supplanting the older. A belief embodying the beautiful thought, that we really do not die until those who knew us and loved us are also dead.

The Vedda religion then is a cult of the spirits of the dead; not so 769
much an ancestor worship, though a few names of long dead Veddas, such as Bilinde Yakka and Kande Yakka have a place in it, as a homage 771
to spirits recently deceased (*Nae-Yakka*).†

The named demons of the pure Veddas are few, and their propitiatory 776
ceremonies but two or three. Nevertheless, a half-Vedda devil-dancer of Galmede gave me the names of a hundred devils, and unctuously ex- 796
pounded a demonology as involved as it was terrible; taking special delight in describing a dance in which men with hideous masks and jangling bells attached to deer-skin greaves, their bodies stained in imitation of blood, swayed great Vedda *audes* mounted on carved handles, and made the forest echo to thundering drum-beats and demoniac yells.

Of male demons there were:—(1) Tree demons of the *Na* and *Bo* tree; 776
seven to each tree in order of precedence: (2) Rock demons (*Gal-vanniyas*) named after various hills: (3) Flower demons (*Ravathath*): (4) *Bandara* demons; (5) *Vanniyas*—the spirits of four Veddas who were crushed to death in a cave by the fall of the rock overhead; with a shout of "ha" they were transformed into devils. Then there were innumerable female demons, a wife to each male demon (*Kalusalees, Peti-hanayas* and *Hanna-hanayas*).

From all this it will not be wondered at that the Veddas are highly 787
superstitious, and ascribe to many an ordinary incident of life supernatural significance. It is, for instance, an ill omen to meet a Buddhist priest or Moorman when setting out on a journey, or to knock the big toe against a stone or stump. Should a gekko cry when a plan is under discussion, or a blood-sucker‡ or Brahamin lizard fall on one, the portent is bad.

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*The Veddas seem to make no distinction between the words devil and spirit, [196]
the term *yakka* being used for either; thus *Gal-Yakka* means rock-demon, *Nae-Yakka* ancestral spirit. *Hetha* also means spirit or devil and is, if anything, the more malevolent being. *Vanniya* is another word synonymous with *yakka* and *hetha*.

†The Veddas, by Seligmann: page 30.

‡A species of lizard.

787 To ignore such warnings would be to court failure or even disaster. When
a *kotaha* (large gekko) quaintly cries " krok, krok," a Vedda will seriously
lean towards it and ask, "Shall we shoot a monkey to-morrow?"
" Krok," says the *kotaha*, and the questioner's face falls, for here no
answer is good news. Then there is that subtle thing the *kille*, an evil
778 influence possessed by certain kinds of meat when eaten under circum-
262 stances too involved to explain. The flesh of pigs, peafowl, langurs
and a species of fish (*urang*, *monerang*, *wandoorang*, *magurang*) are said
to have this property; but here it would seem that the rhyming of the
names has something to do with their evil association.

776 There is an interesting little spirit, belief in which (as with many of the other superstitions already mentioned) is as universal among the Sinhalese as the Veddas. *Bothili*, *Vilirany*, or *Kunnu-yakkini** (dirty she-devil) is its name. It is said to have a nasty nack of grasping one's leg in the dark, and so making it wither to the thinness of an *illuk*-blade. The incarnation of a woman who died in child-birth it is thought to be, and comes moaning at night in the form of a light. The story is best told in the words of a solemnly sworn eye-witness:—Kalu Banda (the narrator) and his sister Balahamy were occupying a watch-hut in a *kurrukhan* field one dark night when they heard a moaning as of one in pain—"*andoa*, *andoa*, *oo oo oo*." Kalu Banda, suspecting what it was, told his sister not to speak—for the *villirany* is shy of women and vanishes at the sound of their voice. He then charmed a little oil, and placing it some distance away, called out, " If you have a stomach-ache, come, rub some oil, and go away." A shadow appeared at which Kalu Banda
[825] fired. On going to the spot, what should he find but a green blood-sucker,^
with a red head! This is said to be the invariable discovery when the *bodili* is killed. The same is said of the devil bird; but here apparently the rule has exceptions; for I have met several people who shot at devil birds, and had a bird to show.

825 The identity of the devil-bird—*ulama* or *ulalena*——is still a matter of doubt; and it is a pity that those who have had the rare fortune to shoot this bird have not thought it worth their while to send it up for identification. Much of the mystery surrounding it is due to the fact that it cries only at night and has wide and sporadic circuits. That it has some sort of a crest, I think, there can be no doubt; also that it is a large bird mottled in its breast feathers like a jungle-hen. These particulars all my reliable informants (who shot the bird as it cried at night) have independently confirmed. It is supposed to be the brown wood owl (*Surnium indrani*) by some, the *Huhua nepalensis* by others. The theory that different birds are capable of uttering the devil-bird's cry, is, I think, quite untenable. Its note is too invariable and distinctive for that.

825 The cry of the *ulama*, like that of the owl (*bakumuna*) and *hanga*, is
said to be a portent, varying according to its direction. Should it come
787 from the west, it forbodes rain; from the east, good luck; from the
north, the visit of a relative or friend; from the south, a death. One of
these birds hovered about our camp one night uttering its blood-curdling
calls, now from this direction, now from that, baffling the ingenuity of
825 its interpreters! Its " hoo-oo " is most eerily human; but it has an
even worse note, a gurgling chuckle, strongly suggestive of a person

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*This is perhaps none other than the Ceylon loris.

^[a species of lizard.—Analyst]

being strangled. I know a man who, on hearing this cry, rushed out 825
of this house one night, lantern in hand, imagining murder was afoot! A creature with a voice like that should not complain if stories are told of it. According to some, the bird is the incarnation of a Buddhist priest who goes about seeking his stolen book wailing, "*Mai potha ko?*" (Where is my book?). Others say the *ulama* cries whenever it sees a corpse prepared for burial held up before it by an exultant demon; then uttering a succession of screams it falls senseless from its perch. The most 825
gruesome story to its credit is the following; even the old women who
relate these tales show particular reticence with regard to this one:— 539
Once there lived a man and his wife and they had a little child. One day when the woman went out to fetch firewood, the man killed his child, cut up some of its flesh and cooked and ate it, leaving a portion on the fire for his wife. When she returned she saw the meat and asked her husband where he had got it.

"Never mind that," said the man. "You eat."

The woman was enjoying her meal when suddenly she noticed a child's finger on her plate.

"Where is our child?" she asked apprehensively.

"That is what you are eating", said her inhuman husband.

Thereupon the woman, thrusting the handle of a coconut-shell spoon into her head, fled into the jungle shrieking, "*Mai lamaya ko? Mai lamaya ko?*" (Where is my child? Where is my child?) and became the crested *ulama*. Now this story, folk-lore though it be, confirms the assumption that the devil bird has some sort of a tuft on its head.

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Strike-a-light and flint. (Page 74)

Vedda axe and audes

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Fire making by rubbing sticks. (Page 74)

[Facing p. 74]

3. SOME VEDDA ARTS AND A DANCE

321

EDIBLE LIME

276 [237] THE Vedda method of making from snail-shells an edible lime, the concomitant of a betel or bark chew, is interesting. Four varieties of snail afford it :—The large, white, land snails (*wantako* or *godang bello*) ; the small, black, river snails (*alang bello* or *gadu bello*), found in dry stream beds ; the bivalved *ethal bello* ; and the convoluted *kankuro* or *lanu bello*.

The *wantako* give the best lime. Six to twelve of their shells are dropped into a small fire, and a layer of dry twigs is laid over them. The flame is now vigorously fanned with a leafy sprig, to prevent the shells getting charred. When the overlying layer of twigs is reduced to embers, and the shells glow white, they are gently picked off with a stick, taken on the palm and placed in a large leaf (*kenda* or *halmilla*). A little water is then added or, in its absence, saliva ! The leaf is quickly folded over the shells which now disintegrate and " ripen." They are then smashed up with the fingers, and the chunam is distributed.

When the small *gadu bello* are used, the process is slightly different : the burnt shells, moistened and bundled in a leaf as before, are replaced on the embers quietened down with a sprinkling of water. The chunam from these is coarser and more gritty than that from the *wantako*.

FIRE MAKING

372 Fire is obtained by jungle folk in a variety of ways. When gun-powder is to hand there is a choice of two methods : (*a*) A little powder is placed on a stone and closely surrounded with small fragments of cloth or tree cotton. It is then ignited, and the rag set on fire, by striking it sharply with an axe-head previously warmed by rubbing on a rock. (*b*) When, in addition to powder, a cap is available, the powder is put into a small square of rag with the upturned cap in its centre. Into the cap the point of a knife is inserted, and the rag is closed over and clapsed firmly against the blade. The striking of this on a stone explodes the cap, ignites the powder, and lights the rag.

These methods being too wasteful for routine use, the commonest mode of fire-making in the jungles is by means of a C-shape iron strike-a-light (*gini-katuwa*) and a piece of chert or crystalline quartz (*irimana gal*), against which is a piece of *kitul* cotton or rag to take the spark when the two are struck together.

The most primitive, and essentially Vedda, art of making fire is by the attrition of two sticks. Although I had hitherto travelled much in Ceylon forests, always making inquiries about this mode of obtaining [184] fire, it was not until I came to Bingoda that I was able to see it done, and that with astonishing ease. In Henebedde and Bintenne the art was dead ; indeed some of the Veddas had never even heard of it !

The light *velang* stick of which arrows are made is the wood *par excellence* for fire making. Elephants being fond of the tree, the dry

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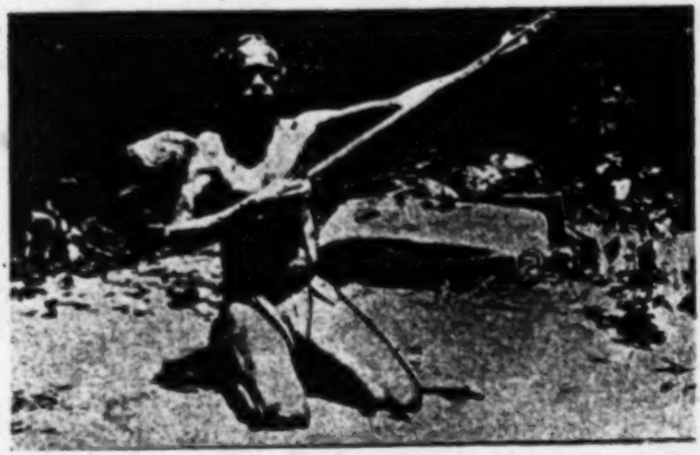

Method of measuring length of arrow shaft. (Page 76)

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Feathering the arrow. (Page 76)

[Facing p.75]

sticks are easily obtainable from broken branches scattered everywhere. 372 Gama, who was entrusted with the demonstration, chose two twigs, one the thickness of the index finger and about a foot and a half long, the other as thick as the little finger and about ten inches long. Having barked these, he whittled down the centre of the larger stick, and, in the flat surface thus produced, scooped out a shallow cavity, at one border of which he contrived a V-shaped extension. A piece of cloth about two inches square was placed on the ground under the centre of the stick which was held firmly down, cavity uppermost, by the toes of the operator, aided by the hands of an assistant. The smaller stick was then placed vertically over the other—its point, rendered bluntly conical, engaging in the cavity—and briskly rotated between the open palms. The firm downward pressure with which these movements were accompanied, caused the palms to descend the length of the stick from time to time. As often as this happened, the hands were quickly disengaged and re-applied as before to the upper part, and the twirling manoeuvre repeated. This had been done but twice when smoke was seen. Soon a small heap of charred dust like coffee-grounds accumulated round the hole, to escape down the V-shaped gutter on to the cloth. The smoke increased; there was a smell of charred wood. Suddenly a spark was thrown on to the black dust and the rag caught fire. A few dry leaves were collected and set alight. Within two minutes of the commencement of the operation there was a lively fire. When the smoke is observed to come from the accumulated dust, apart from that at the point of contact between the two sticks, it is a sign that the object is achieved. The rag is then rolled to enclose the dust—cigarette-fashion—and blown into at one end, so that it soon smokes heavily and catches fire.

It is strange that an art so simple in adept hands (not by any means [178] so in those of a novice) should have been allowed to fall into disuse in wild Ceylon. I have seen refinements of this method; a coconut-shell, flat stone, or skull of a small animal for instance, being used by an assistant to press down the vertical stick, and a twist of bark to rotate it but they were less effectual than the simple procedure I have described.

ARCHERY

322

The present day Veddas, we have seen, are poor bowmen; they have. 411 however, not yet quite lost the art of fashioning superb bows and arrows.

The bow is made from the *makakakala-gaha* or the *kobawela*; the stone [824] bow (*gal-dhunna*) from the *gatawela-gaha*; the bow string from the inner sheath of the bark of *aralu-wel*.*

The size of the bow is proportioned to the archer's strength. I have seen one six and a half feet long and as thick as a child's wrist; and, judging from its drawing power, no hand but a giant's could have wielded it. The usual length of a bow is from five and a half feet to five feet ten inches. It is made of a single stave, thick at the centre, without contrivance to give grip, flattened along the back, and tapering towards the horns which, without being notched, are tightly encircled by a few turns of cord to prevent the string slipping.

The arrow is made from the *ee* or *velang*† tree, the wood of which when dry is of remarkable lightness. A straight twig the girth of the finger

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**Terminalia chebula.*

†Pterospermum suberifolium.

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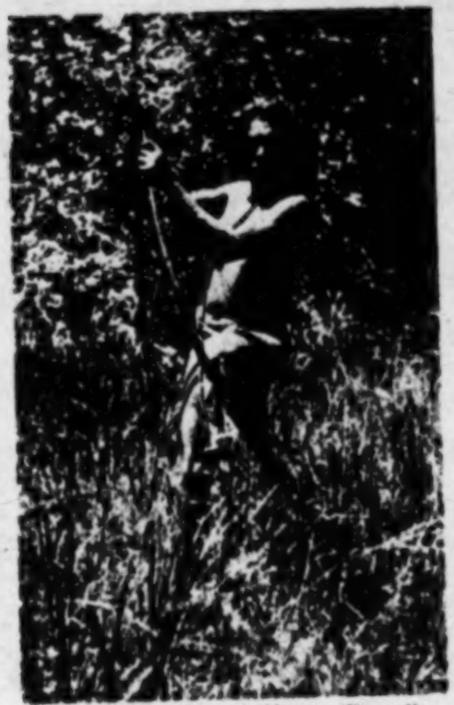
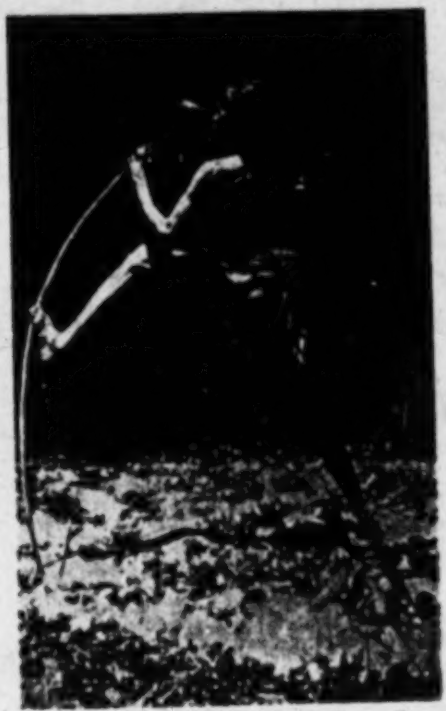


Stringing bow with aid of knee. (Page 76)



Stringing bow by foot-thrust. (Page 76)

322 411 is taken, barked, and straightened by being passed rapidly a few times through a flame, and then bent over the knee or between the hands. It is shaved down to uniform thickness with an arecanut-cutter or arrow blade, and cut to suitable length, roughly gauged by holding it along the outstretched arm from the nearer nipple to the end of the middle finger, giving it an average measure of two and a half feet, or slightly less. An arrow belonging to the great bow I have mentioned, measured three and a half feet. The nock or notch is a quarter of an inch deep and cut square.

411 237 284 The arrow is feathered with the wing plumes of the owl, devil-bird, jungle-cock, or large crane (*mana koka*); the owl's, besides being the best, are easily picked up along dry stream beds, on the trees bordering which the birds usually roost. A feather is split unequally down the rachis, only the larger segment being used. Four such segments, about two inches long, are arranged equidistantly round the shaft, an inch and a quarter from the end, and bound neatly down with *aralu* fire, the mouth helping in the process. The first turns are merely taken round that part of the shaft, which is immediately below the feathers, then round the bared lower ends of the rachis, and then carried along, at spaced intervals, between the carefully separated barbs. Should a strand not prove long enough, it is finished off by having its end tucked in between rachis and shaft, and another is similarly begun. Finally the ruffled barbs are straightened out between the thumb and fingers moistened with saliva. A few turns of fibre just below the notch serve to give grip to the drawing fingers.

411 The arrow-head is made of flattened iron obtained from local blacksmiths. It is three to five inches long, of lanceolate shape in imitation of the *na* leaf, and sharp at the edges; serving as much as a cutting implement as an arrow. By a tang it is let into the end of the shaft to which it is firmly secured with fibre. All the strung parts of the arrow, [824] as well as the bow-string, are finally dressed with the sticky milk of *kiri-wel* to prevent untwisting. Both bow and arrow, being very liable to the ravages of boring insects, are always kept hung over the smoke when not in use.

The method of stringing the bow is by placing one end of it, to which the string is knotted, on the ground, and then pressing on its centre either with the bent knee or by a foot thrust. A correctly strung bow should measure at its centre a span between string and belly of bow; this is rather more than the "fist-mele" (clenched fist with thumb upright) the rough estimate of European stringing.

The arrow release favoured by the Veddas is that in which the cord is drawn with the first joints of the index and middle fingers, the arrow being usually placed on the left of the bow. The style of archery is often peculiar: the arrow fitted to the bow is raised head high; the right elbow is now swung up in an awkward flourish above the head, and then brought slowly down to alignment with the eye, as the string is drawn out to its fullest extent and the arrow delivered.

DANCING

177 535 The ceremonial dances of the Veddas have been minutely described and illustrated by Seligmann. The dance we are about to describe seems to have been performed before him in its greatest purity at Henebedda. The differences between his description and ours must be

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A Vedda archer of Bintenne. (Page 76)

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Boundary tree marked with bow mark or *dhunu hena*. (Page 79)

attributed to Sinhalese influence, especially the substitution of the mortar 177
for the tripod, the drum for the slapping of hands and thighs, and the 535
introduction of the coconut scraper and betel leaves.

The *kiriboraha* (milk-chatty)* dance has for its object the co-operation 535
of certain ancestral spirits (*Nae Yakku*) in hunting enterprises. The
occasion for it is a period of repeated ill luck, which is attributed to the 796
disfavour of these spirits, whose names are, *Kande Yakka*, the great
hunter, his brother *Bilinde Yakka* and their wives *Kudu Hora* (nest thief) [776]
and *Pol Hora* (coconut thief) respectively; also *Hath-kudu Hora* (seven-
nests thief), elder brother of the two she demons. Significant signs in
the ceremony are the fine bubbles that form when the coconut milk is [787]
handled, and the manner in which the coconut divides; if the halves
are equal the omen is good, in unequal, bad.

In a clearing was placed a mortar and on it a bowl containing a coconut
with two arrows laid across the brim. Kaurala, the dancer, took care [262]
to eat no meat that morning. Having smeared his head with lime-juice
and his body with saffron, he would have worn a white cloth borrowed
for the purpose, had we not dissuaded him from covering his picturesque
nudity, much to the disapproval of the other Veddas who feared the
anger of the spirits invoked.

The dance began quietly enough. Taking up the coconut and an arrow, the performer clasped them together in his hands which he placed now on the shoulder, now on the head, now well before him, as he walked round the mortar chanting a supplication to *Kande Yakka*. Soon he began hopping alternately on each heel, making half-turns with the body so characteristic of Vedda dances, and sweeping his arms semi-circularly. Gradually the monotonous song loudened to the drum-beats, and more and more vigorous became the contortions of the dancer, whose shaggy hair covered his face and whose body streamed with sweat. So he danced for perhaps a half hour, when suddenly he became as one possessed. *Kande Yakka* had "covered" him. Shouting the fearful name he staggered to the mortar and, bending over the bowl, split the coconut in halves. He stood by panting, while the coconut was scraped, the milk prepared, and seven betel leaves were arranged around the sides of the bowl, which was then replaced on the mortar with a single arrow across it. The other arrow, with a betel leaf transfixed in its point, was now in the hands of the dancer who holding it at both ends resumed his movements. *Bilinde Yakka*, the spirit next invoked, soon possessed him. The dance was then continued to each of the other spirits, male and female, in turn. By each of these he was successively possessed. With each possession the strange, wild-eyed figure before us, apparently oblivious of his surroundings, shouted the name of the mastering demon,† and threw lifeless hands on the shoulders of one or other of the onlookers as if for support. Eventually, when the frenzy was at its height, he had just breath enough to gasp out the inspired message that the spirits were propitious and success was assured‡. With his forearm he indicated the length of the quarry's horns and, pointing to the heavens, the favourable time for starting. Then, taking up the two arrows and the bowl containing the two halves of the coconut, the milk and the betel leaves, he danced

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*Coconut milk is the juice obtained by squeezing out with water the scraped kernel of the coconut.

†*Pana kiyanawa.*

‡*Hoay galgawara magalak alla thenawa.*

535 796 to all the spirits combined. Suddenly he stooped, twirled the chatty on the ground, and shouting " hooy ", fell swooning into the arms of one who had for some time been waiting to catch him. The dance was over. He was artist enough to impart something of his wild fervour to his spectators.

224 The next day at the appointed hour we set out, the Veddas buoyed up with the certainty of success. We had not gone far when Kaurala, who was leading, suddenly levelled his gun (or rather mine) and fired. A fine buck bounded away.

" Cha ", he said, examining the spot where the animal had stood; " now why did that animal not fall? So close too. That was the *kirikoraha* deer right enough; did you not see the horns?" When he discovered that he had fired the barrel containing small shot and not the bullet, he fell to cursing my gun.

782 224 Should an animal be killed after a *kirikoraha* ceremony an offering of boiled rice, with flesh from the head and chest, is made to the propitious spirits. Of this offering the hunters may themselves partake with a view to continuance of success.

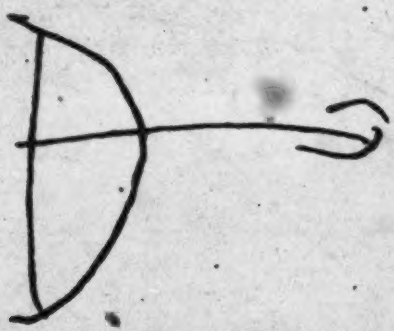
4. VEDDA JUNGLES

The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them

ISAIAH.

THE forests we were now in were the immemorial haunts of the Veddas of Bingoda, Galmede and Sittala Wanniya. They stretched from Bingoda to Newaragala, and included such famous Vedda hills as Walimbe (Friar's Hood) and Bandaradua. The Magalavatan Aar cleaves this country on its way to Unichi tank. The jungle is virginal, but one is surprised to find here an occasional guava bearing luscious fruit, and much wild cinnamon. *Palu* and *veera*, so abundant in the more southern forests, is wanting here. 131 [137]

Nowhere is the Vedda more at home than in this wilderness, intersected by game trails only known to him and wild animals, and studded with the rocks that hold his caves. This land is all their wealth. By old Vedda law it is divided into *panguas* or shares, marked off by such natural landmarks as streams, rocks, or conspicuous trees scored with the *dhuna hena* (bow mark) distorted beyond recognition with age. The *panguas* of the Bingoda Veddas are six:—(1) Madana-gama: (2) Marana-pangua: (3) Kumburuwella-gama (kuda and maha): (4) Bingoda: (5) Kakalana-bokke: (6) Bandaradua. Of these, the first three are included under the name Galmede and are now the property of Suthu Banda; the last three are Kaurala's. Each of these divisions, in days of greater prosperity, had its own chieftain. 423 614



Dhuna-hena or bow mark drawn by Vedda

It is to the credit of these Veddas that they alone of all the Veddas in Ceylon can still name their shares, indicate their boundaries, and observe the traditional law of non-transgression, hunting only in their allotted spheres. Suthu Banda, for instance, would not take the swiftlets' nests on Walimbe because they were Kaurala's by right; nor would he break the hives beyond Newaragala because those lands, once Vedda, have now lapsed to the Sinhalese.

Land goes to the eldest child whether son or daughter; failing them to the nephew. In the old days the proofs of inheritance were a white stone (*kirivanagala*) and molar tooth, bound together with a wisp of human hair; later the *ola* supplanted it; and still later a paper document issued by Government, and so carefully hidden away that it was invariably eaten by termites! These people, it would appear, were wiser than Government in their choice of a seizin. 428

[p.79]

423 656 But what irony is all this talk of chiefs and clans and possessions, where only a mere handful of spiritless people is concerned. The Veddas alone recognise their boundaries, Government does not. Quite rightly they are not permitted to fell their forests without sanction, or to give their lands away; for what would be easier than to cozen such simple folk. These Veddas may cultivate *chenas* with permission from Government but without tax; a privilege they are impotent to avail themselves of, and are still hunters enough to disregard, whether under encouragement or compulsion. "What lands have the Veddas now?" lamented Kaurala. "Our rightful lands! Why should we be deprived of them? The earth of our land is honey to us". And in those words he spoke the doom of his race.

Let us leave the last of the Veddas alone, and not try to fashion them to our ways; for that would kill them the sooner. Let them die out, scattered in their lonely jungles, the hunters they have always been. A few decades hence and the Vedda will be but a name.

651 Not every Vedda is exempt from taxation. I believe those in the Eastern Province are taxed, while those of Uva are not. Why this distinction, it is hard to understand; except for the plea that nowadays it is difficult to say who is a Vedda and who not. But, in cases of doubt, the conditions of life that characterise a particular community should be the criterion that influences the decision, favourably or otherwise. It does seem hard that these poor people, who never handle a single cent from one year's end to another, and have barely a rag with which to cover their nakedness, should have to pay a tax of two rupees with the richest in the land! In default of payment, a penalty of some ten days' work on the roads is imposed; an equitable provision on the face of it; but what of the family with the bread-winner thus engaged? After all, these people only live from day to day; and even sickness very often means starvation.

241 311 656 As for *chena* cultivation,* there can be little doubt that it is the one form of agriculture, best suited to the primitive folk of the arid forests; but a serious attempt should be made to better the wasteful methods now in vogue. I remember once travelling through a Province where a progressive, but misguided policy—as applied to these parts—prevailed: *chena* licences had been with-held that year with a view to enforcing paddy cultivation; (in such forests! and among such folk!). The result was disastrous. It was heart-rending to see the starved, emaciated villagers Sinhalese and Veddas alike, digging out wild, unsavoury yams from 261 the baked ground. They would have given their lives for a little *kurrukhan* or maize, which was nowhere to be had.

***Chenas* represent a very primitive and wasteful form of agriculture. In June of each year an area of jungle is leased by several families. The trees are felled, and burnt two weeks later. The land is then cleared, except for a residue of charred trunks. Temporary huts are suitably disposed, and the whole surrounded by a fence-work of burnt logs, so strong that it must be proof against elephants, so tall that it must top the sambur's leap, so close that it must keep out the hare. By August this work is completed.

In September the crops are sown;—Maize or *irindu* which takes 4 months, and manioc which takes a year to mature; vegetables such as pumpkins, melons and beans (*pahul, wattaka, thimbiri, kakiri, loema*); yams such as *kukul-alla, wal-alla, watapol, kodol*. In October and November, *kurrukhan*, chillies, green-gram, and perhaps a little paddy is planted.

During February, March, and April the *kurrukhan* and maize crops are harvested—or rather what is left of them when the elephants and drought have had their say

311 In their inhospitable forests, the most wild and arid in the Island, where food is scarce and only attained with great hardship, the Vedda is king. His lifelong apprenticeship to the harsh conditions fits him superbly to the merciless task. He knows season and place and is sensitive to the slightest clue. How ill-fitted for this life are we of the towns who would starve by a tree with a honey-comb or with a succulent yam under foot. They make us feel like children, in that environment, these admirable Crichtons of the jungle, and our urban refinements as dross compared with their simple skill and hardihood.

151 224 It is truly a delight to travel with the Vedda and watch his ways. Moving silently, speaking no word except to "hum" an animal call to attract each other's attention, they allow nothing to escape them, and read the ground like a book, indicating spoor where you see nothing. Becoming sceptical of such claims I thought I would test the skill of Suthu Banda, also known as Poromola. Telling him to turn his face away, I tip-toed lightly on the bed of leaf that carpeted our path, and asked him to indicate my foot-prints.

"Here they are, and here," he said without a moment's hesitation. "Why, it's easy; don't you see the leaves turned?" (I certainly did not, demonstrate as hard as he might). "What is the difficulty for us to see a human foot-print here," he continued, "who have to follow a mouse-deer's trail on ground that shows less than this."

481 We had halted by a tree of great height and enormous girth, branchless for quite forty feet from the ground—as awkward a proposition for a climber as one could wish. I asked Suthu Banda whether he could climb it. "Why not," he said; and, without so much as putting down the axe hitched to his shoulder, he mounted the rock beside which the tree stood, and looked up a second or two. Then, shinning up an adjacent sapling that shot high, swung on to the slender extremity of the big tree's lowermost branch that sagged under his weight, and moved along with a carelessness painful to watch. He was soon among boughs no bigger than a man's wrist, and from the dizzy height wished to know whether we wanted him to go higher! None of your artificial aids, such as loops, for the Vedda; he is a veritable quadrumana, with feet as prehensile as hands.

224 They have a sure method of killing sambur. In the rainy months, and also, more rarely, in the drought, these animals climb to the tops of solitary hills. The Vedda, always watchful for the opportunity, is quick to detect this by the spoor. Cautiously attaining the summit, one or two of them guard with guns the only path by which the sambur must

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[241] Yams, chillies and melons survive a few months longer. After one to one and a half years the *chena* is abandoned as worthless, and a fresh acreage leased; for *kurrukkan* especially, is reputed to take such heavy toll of the soil, that this must be allowed to lie fallow for some ten or twelve years before being fit for recultivation! A terrible consumption of forest land results, unless controlled; harmless enough where a few families exist in vast forests; but sadly devastating in places at all populous.

Irrigation, as these people know it, is solely what heaven bestows. Water may lie to hand but is not seriously utilised. A drought brings ruin, and scatters the folk far in quest of food. It is time a more economic system of agriculture was introduced to the Vanni, and the people taught, by the institution of model *chenas*, at least the value of forest leaf mould as a manure, and the advantages of some simple system of irrigation from available streams or wells, such as the Tamils of Jaffna and the Moors of the Eastern Province exploit so well.

224 descend; while two or three others, with perhaps a dog, beat the jungle above and start the animal, which is shot almost at the point of the guns.

267 224 There is no flesh the Vedda loves more than that of the wanderoo (grey langur). He will sometimes be seen to halt by a tree, and strike its trunk three resounding blows with his axe-head. This is to discover the whereabouts of the wanderoo. On hearing the sound, these animals, imagining it to be that of a falling tree or rock, give vent to the "a-he-hik" so characteristic of them when startled.

252 [482] One afternoon Suthu Banda brought in a great langur slung on his shoulder, with its tail rove through its slit cheek. Within twenty-five minutes not a morsel of the animal remained. Disjointing the tail at the root, he dissected up a strip of dorsal skin in continuation of it as far as the neck; twisting this over a branch, he suspended and rapidly skinned the quarry. The meat was cut up in pieces and placed on large logs over a fire, the flames licking them all round. Bony segments, such as the spine, ribs and limbs, were pounded on a stone when half burnt, and then replaced on embers. The stomach and entrails were slit open and their contents merely scooped away with the fingers, and roasted. No water whatever was used! It was a truly sickening sight to see the relish with which the intestines with adherent faecal matter 262 were greedily eaten. When we remarked on the repulsiveness of it, the gluttonous epicure calmly remarked, "Yes, the filth gets eaten right enough. What of it? It is good medicine. If you get a wanderoo what haven't you got? No marriage is like it." How true is the saying that the pig and the Vedda are one!

226 224 Fish* abound in the forest streams, all bony and very indifferent to the taste. The Veddas catch these, not with rods or nets, but with poisons. The fruit, bark or root of certain trees† is smashed up and thrown into pools or banked waterways. The water is then stirred; as it gets stained the fish become restless, and leap on to the bank, or turn belly upwards stupefied. They are collected and boiled with a [251 252] little salt and a few chillies and eaten at once, or dried over a trestle like meat.

222 Let us see what sort of fare the jungle trees provide. Of fruit there is plenty in season:—*Mora*, *kong*, *galseembela*, *veera*, *palu*, *damba*, jak, guavas, *ulkantha*, *hibutoo*, *bulanga*, *kothalanga*, *leyaneya*, *karambe*, *madu* never eaten raw because it causes giddiness and vomiting!). The cabbages of palms such as *inthibada* and *kitulalla*. Yams:—*Gonala*, *katuala*, *hirathala*, *alalla*, in order of preference. Then there are the [261] various barks they chew incessantly to stay the hunger of their long fasts:—*Demata*, *bolvilla* and *thambola*, all substitutes for betel; and *davata* for arecanut; and besides these the barks of *opulu*, *galseembela*, *mora*, *habatha*, *nuga*, *kalawa*, *galkara*, and in fact anything, however, insipid, provided it is not poisonous.

757 752 Their medicines are few. There is *gonkuttudalu* which they crush up with water and apply to the head for headaches; *meelalla-pothu* which they smash up with *chunam* and use as a dressing for wounds; but for abrasions of the foot they will as soon rub in a little sand with

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* *Walapotho*, *anguluo*, *lulo*, *katukanao*, *kanupatho*, *antho* (eels), *maguro*, *hungo*, *kehsliyo*, *pethy*, *walihondo*, *selhalu*; *badapathalo*, *walihairiyo*, *piniweliyo*, *kovalayo*, *galpanduruo*.

† *Kukurumang-gedde*, *kala-mul*, *thimbiri-gedde*, *dhamba-pothu*, *pussal-mul*.

757
the other heel. Python fat is used for fractures. *Nagamaru-alla* has a 752
great reputation as an aphrodisiac, less among the Veddas than among
the Moors and Tamils. *Bing kohomba* (*munronia pumila*) gathered in 832
the hills, and *kansa* (*cannabis indica*) grown surreptitiously, are always
barterable. Besides the lesser poisons used for stupefying fish, there are 276
the deadly *neagalla-alla* (*gloriosa superba*); *mansa-kolle* (*laportea crenulata*); 824
thea-kadurugedda (*cerbera odallam*) and *hirinihea*.

There can be little doubt that much of the *cannabis indica* obtainable 276
in Ceylon is grown in the forests by the encouragement of Moors. Traffic in the drug being illegal, the plant is cultivated clandestinely in sequestered jungle clearings or scattered amidst the vegetation of *chenas*. Though the plants fetch a good price, they are hardly worth the trouble and risk involved in tending them; and they say that "money got from *kansa* never stays in the hand." Not only have the plants to be watered for at least three months, but, very often, just as the crop is ready for harvesting, a thief helps himself to it. The commodity is conveyed to the lonely coast or the high road in the dead of night, along unfrequented game trails, in bags containing nests, grain, or dried meat.

A poignant story concerns the discovery of the *nagamaru-alla*, that 832
esteemed aphrodisiac so difficult to find. A Vedda boy and his sister
were travelling alone in the forest, when a shower of rain drove them to 539
seek shelter under a tree. As is usual with Veddas when they rest, the boy stuck his arrows into the ground. Then, taking out of his pouch of monkey skin a chew of *demata* bark, he shared it with his sister; and, plucking out an arrow from the ground, placed on its point a little lime and gave it to her. She had scarcely tasted this when she began to manifest unsisterly familiarity. Her brother, incensed and shamed, drew his bow and killed her on the spot. Overcome by sorrow at what he had done, he debated in his mind as to why his sister, so good before, should suddenly have behaved so shamelessly. It occurred to him that the explanation might lie in the spot the arrow had been implanted; digging there he found a yam his arrow had transfixed. Thus was its named derived *nagamaru-alla* or yam that killed a sister; the Tamils call it *thangai kolai* which means the same thing. The marks of the tragedy are said to be evident to this day in the red spots that fleck the flower and leaf. I have seen the plant, a ground orchid, twice, but only the white-flowered variety not the reputedly more potent mottled. The slender stalk, bearing a delicate flower about half the size of a lupin, grows out of two downy ovoid yams.

The proper home of the Vedda is the *galge* or cave; and in these until 342
recent years, the wilder of them exclusively lived. Now they only serve
as occasional haunts, and therefore often have other occupants besides [178]
Veddas, chiefly bears; for this reason no Vedda approaches an unoccupied
cave without warning: "*Cho-ho-ho, cho-ho-ho*," he shouts. "*Kiribala,* [574]
karia, karia, cho-ho-ho, cho-ho-ho." A snarl and a rush often greet the words. These rock-shelters are invariably hidden away among trees and boulders, and are extremely difficult to find except by those who know them.

Many of the caves are spacious, open and inviting; others dark and forbidding. Some source of water, such as a stream or spring, is usually at hand. The sloping roofs of the caves often present such crude picture galleries as we saw at Henanagalla, also wasps' nests, and the clustering

342 eggs of gekkoes very like candle droppings. A few of the caves have drip ledges (evidence of Sinhalese occupation) which serve to keep them dry: those without this feature are all adrip during the rains and their floors are mossy. Rocky out-crops, large loose stones and, perhaps a white-ant hill or two, divide up the floor space into sections in which the various Vedda families lie grouped, each in its allotted span. Here and [312] there the stony floor is cupped where maize has been pounded, or worn smooth where *kurrukkan* has been rubbed to flour with the flat polished stones that lie about. A fire-place or two, a cooking frame, and dry leaves (*pana*, *pinney dea*, or *kelanea*), the bedding of these people, complete the picture.

Let us take the more important of the caves as we pass them on our way from Bingoda to Newaragala. Like our houses they are all named.

Matigaha galge is a deep roomy grotto formed by a superincumbent rock mass supported slantwise on large flanking boulders. Partially obstructing its entrance, and just within cover of its roof, is a steep rounded stone which one family would occupy silhouetted against a [312] tree-intersected sky. Its only source of water is the Magalavatan Aar a quarter mile away. This disadvantage, and its nearness to the Bingoda homes, accounts for its present disuse. Suthu Banda was born here. Kaurala who had not seen it since his childhood could not help a word of regret on seeing it now after the long years: "Ah!" he sighed. "Is this the old home. No one to inhabit it now."

Galthala galge (Rock-slab cave) owes its name to a slab of rock within it, beneath which one must crawl to gain a gloomy inner compartment. A reedy pool below, and the cyfax, cactus and vines about its mouth give it a touch of wild picturesqueness.

Alu galge (Ash cave), which lies at the base of Newaragala, is less a cave than a passage under an immense boulder spanning two lateral outcrops. It is so well concealed by large stones guarding its mouth that one would not suspect its presence even when standing within a few feet of it. The floor slopes up steeply towards a narrowing exit, and is so bestrewn with rocks as to afford no convenient resting place. Yet, in a cranny here or a basin there, the Veddas contrive to make themselves comfortable, as the withered leaves that have served them as mats testify. A small tripodal frame shows where flesh has been [312] roasted. There is no lack of water here; for not only does a perennial spring lie at its entrance, the resort of innumerable bears during the drought, but in the rainy season a rivulet flows right through the cave.

This cave is a favourite of the Veddas who come here when the jak 222 trees, which grow on the slopes of Newaragala, are in fruit. Then, spending [261] a few days, they feast to surfeiting on the tender fruit, and with their characteristic improvidence carry none away. It was here that Kaurala stayed when he "skinned" Nuwaragala—which was his own beautiful way of saying he had stripped it clean of hives. How secret are the ways of Veddas may be judged from the fact that here was a cave frequented by them without its being known to the Sinhalese who lived six miles away. And we who had once spent a night on Newaragala were ignorant that here below us was a cave used by the very Veddas we yearned to know.

261 But of all the caves I have seen *Dhik galge* was the best. I have already described this cave; it remains for me to add a few vital touches. In

front of it is a much chipped *opulu* tree from which the Veddas every 261
now and then renew their chew. Throughout the day the surrounding
woods echo to the voices of food-gatherers or the blows of axes, as
combs are cut out of hollow trees. At fiful intervals the *kolong koka* 825
(stork-billed king-fisher), lord of the rocky stream, raises a clamorous
cry, or the wood-pecker startlingly proclaims to the world that it sees
the great she-demon (*maha yakkini*). As evening comes, the *hotaha*
(gekko) that shares the cave, drawls in quaint imitation of his name,
"ko-tak-ko." The night is ushered in by the solemn notes of the night
jar* and bell-like sounds of frogs. The crescent moon shines through
the trees, peopling the forest with mysterious shadows. Strange noises
are heard around, a breaking branch perhaps, a dropping stone, or an
animal's foot-falls. Then the little one creeps to its mother whispering,
"Mother, the *hetha*"; and she, fondling, replies, "Yes, it is the *hetha*,
child; be still." Now fires are stirred, and the Veddas, couched on 354
leaves, and doubled up under their meagre rags, lie as close to them as 513
they dare. For the caves are cold at night even on the hottest day.
And every now and then throughout the dark, one or other of them
groans with the chill, gets up, pokes the fire, and snuggles nearer to it.
Is it a wonder that ash is the morning mark of the Vedda and *Alu galge*
a favourite name of his cave? By six, the morning mists have melted
and the cave begins to warm.

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*At dusk, and all through the night, Horsfield's night jar gathers into its rich liquid notes the silence and mystery of the forest. There is no jungle, however desolate, in which this ever welcome music is not heard. It is at once the curfew of the jungle, the embodiment of all the stealthy, nocturnal life in it, and the destiny and doom of it.

Putha-hath-porowe (seven-sons-axe) is the Sinhalese name of the bird in perfect [539]
imitation of its cry; and the following story explains it.—A woman once sent her seven sons into the jungle to fell trees. One of the trees falling in their direction, the brothers attempted to shoulder it off and were all killed. The mother, having cooked the evening meal, waited at home for her sons. But as they did not return she went out to look for them, and found them all dead beside the fallen tree. Taking up an axe she killed herself and became this bird; and now from dusk till dawn she cries *putha-hath-porowe* through the lonesome woods

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An ape for dinner. (Page 82)

342

Alu-galge, a Vedda cave. (Page 84)

[Facing p.86]

5. NESTS AND HIVES

This is the time to climb the steep ;
Up through the shadowy woods to grope,
Over the stones where the lichens creep,
On to the crag that crowns the slope ;
To the wild bees stronghold hushed in sleep.

J. STILL

NESTS

136 IN dark fearsome caverns, and down the sides of dizzy ravines, the little
222 edible-nest swiftlet builds its dainty nest fashioned of hardened saliva
and moss. Those who think they know better will tell you that the all
but invisible specks, sometimes seen high away in the empyrean at dusk,
are flights of these birds on their way to the sea to gather salt foam with
which to build.

222 One of the favourite pursuits of the Veddas is the collecting of these
nests for barter. They call the birds *kudukarayas* (nest-makers) and their
[439] nesting caves *kudu galges*. These caves are often deep gloomy recesses
only entered with lighted candles (made by squeezing a column of bees-
[373] wax round a central wick of cloth or bark) to scare away the scores of
poisonous snakes (*karawalas* and *mapilas*) that gather there to eat the
eggs and young. Sometimes the nests stud the steep sides of narrow
[417] gorges, and are then taken by the aid of cane ladders let down from above.

The nesting-places are a secret the Veddas guard closely. When they took me on one of their expeditions it was on the condition that no bearers came. A hard climb brought us to near the summit of the tree-covered mountain side. "*Cho-ho-ho,*" shouted the Veddas as a warning to possible bears. The approach to the cave was over-run with *aralu-wel* (used for bows) and *niyande* (of which waist strings are made). The cave itself, surmounted by an enormous rock the fall of which seemed imminent, was dark and stifling ; and it was quite a time before one could discern the cup-shaped nests that clung in clusters to the vaulted roof. A Vedda handed me a parent bird he had trapped, a tiny-beaked, brownish thing, with sweeping wings, black feet and unswallow-like tail. It was quite a time too before one realised that there was a commotion in the air, and that little wraith-like forms were flitting in and out in sore distress "Swish, swish ; wing, wing ; twit, twit ; kisiri, bisiri ; takara, takara ; kata, kata, kata," as from fairy castanets, came the barely audible sounds. Outside, these were louder, "Chara-chiris, chara-chiris ; che-week, che-week, che-week," they twittered in futile resentment. But to these sounds the ruthless despoilers were deaf, as, mounted on heaps of stones, they scraped away with knife or arecanut cutter the trim nests from their tenacious attachments, leaving only those with eggs behind, lest the colony be killed outright. On a boulder near by
[252] was a fire-place where the young had been roasted, as Kauwa of Divulana
had described.

[p. 86]

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" Over the edge." (Page 89)

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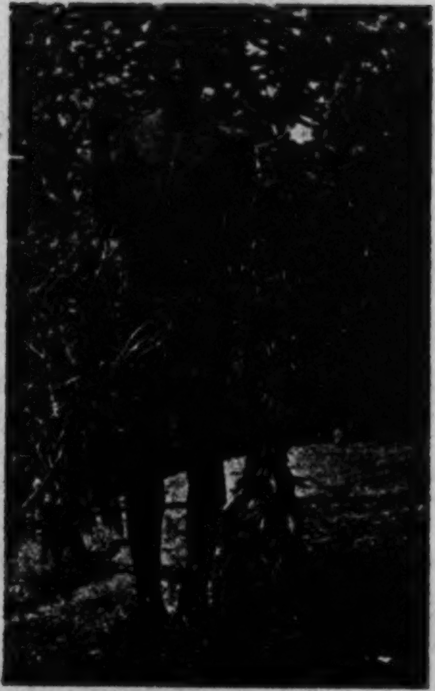

Honey-gatherer, girt with torches and stake, ready to descend. (Page 89)

[Facing p.87]

HIVES

There are five varieties of honey bee in Ceylon :—The large *bambara* 222
(*Apis dorsata*) that builds huge combs of very pure wax on bare hill sides
and the large branches of lofty trees ; the *mee massa* (*Apis indica*) sweetest 136
honey bee of all, whose combs are to be found in hollow trees, rock-clefts
and within ant-hills ; the *dandual massa* (*Apis florea*), the smallest honey-
bee in the world, that hives on rocks and boughs ; the *kanava massa*
(Rosin or Dammar bee) a docile, stingless, friendly little creature whose
long black combs within tree crevices yield a delicious, if heady, honey ;
the *kotha massa*, an even smaller species, whose puny comb is hardly
worth the taking.

Kanava and *kotha* combs are available all the year round ; they are the 222
pathinchikarayas or stayers. If the Vedda is hungry it is for one of these
he goes at a pinch. The *bambara* and *mee massa*, the most abundant
honey makers, are seasonal in their habits ; and June and July are the
great honey months ; the fruit season synchronising with this, marks
these months as the festive time of the jungle ; then the Veddas leave [439]
their homes for caves and stream beds, take their fill, and have a surplus
for barter.

On the flavours of honey the Veddas are connoisseurs. They can tell [151
by tasting a comb the flower or medley of flowers that contributed to its 262]
making. That honey is relished most which prevails when the *mora*,
veera and *galsembela* are in bloom.

Honey gathering is the master art of the Vedda. Supreme as he is in
other jungle crafts, he is supremest in this. As he travels through the
forest he is alive to the faintest hum, and no hive, however concealed,
escapes him. His adroitness in tracking a bee to its lair is well described
in a delightfully euphonious song they have (beginning, *Thomba*, *thomba* [533]
Gomba me-na-na), that tells of a Vedda Thutha who goes on the honey
quest with his brothers Gomba and Naga. Thutha leads in the trail
of a particular bee ; and as he goes he sings to his brothers, indicating
various trees in which bees are busy ; but not decoyed by these, and
with his eye steadily on the bee he first sighted, he follows it, till eventually
it guides him to its hive within the skull of an elephant—*kolanathe gatche*
(tree without leaves) as he quaintly describes.

The taking of any hive, other than that of the rock *bambara*, is a very simple thing for the Vedda. All he does is to climb the tree, steady himself at the hole containing the comb, and blow into it to drive the bees away. Then with his axe he enlarges the opening sufficiently to enable him to introduce a hand and secure the cache, stopping every now and then to blow inside or to slap an offending bee. He eats the comb at his perch, grubs and all, throwing down fragments to those below.

The *bambara* comb is quite a different proposition. These great bees
build high on the precipitous sides of rocks ; their security lying not in
their seclusion but in their inaccessibility. These hives are the prize
of the bold and skilful only. A dangling cane at Westminster Abbey [417
gave us some idea of the daring of the enterprise. To reach the combs
ladders of vines are lowered from the summit of the rock ; and down these 481]
the collector descends ; as this does not bring him within arm's length
of the hives, he has usually to rely on the use of a long stake. Sometimes

222 the hives are beyond the reach even of this: and then, though the honey itself may not be secured, the wax may, by being dislodged with long bamboos and collected at the foot of the hill; *iti bambara* (wax hives) such combs are called. There are others, so safe under prominent brows, that they are absolutely untakeable; *yakkini baliya* (she-demon's portion) is the name of them.

[417] When the rock is not too high, the ladder is made long enough to reach the ground, where it can be held slantwise close up against the face of the rock, bringing the gatherer within easier access of the hive. But where the hill is too lofty for this, as usually happens, the ladder hangs free, and the gatherer may even have to swing to and fro to enable him to get at the combs. Nor is this all; the *bambaras*, several of which may kill a man, have to be reckoned with; they can only be dispersed by heavy smoking; and, what is worse, when several hives are clustered together in a colony, the work has to be done on a pitch dark night.

Imagine then the picture of the man smothered in smoke, assailed by angry bees, swinging in the darkness two hundred feet or more above the stony earth, with neck and knee hitched to the ladder so as to leave the arms free to manipulate torch and prong. Is it a wonder that every Vedda is not a *kapunkaraya* or cutter, but only the boldest of them; and that he, when he descends to his work, does so without thought in his heart of life or father or mother?*

222
417
234 We will now describe the scene as it actually takes place:—On Panihela were five large combs the Veddas meant to have one night. That morning they assembled on the rock. Their first business was to collect the canes and vines that go to the making of the ladder (*yothala*). Two canes, some twenty or thirty feet long and about an inch in diameter, were cut, dragged to the top of the hill, and lined out. Knotting the end of one to a tree they split it in half. One man, standing at the end, held these apart; while two others stood in between, constructing strong rungs at intervals of two feet with *kiriwel* creepers, which they first looped round the two halves of the cane and then bound together with a running twist. A ladder of any length may thus be constructed; for, should a single cane not be long enough, its ends are looped and interlocked with similar loops in another length of split cane. The ladder is finished off by overlapping and binding together the free ends in the form of an U. This is the type of ladder employed in the perilous descents; where the drop is easier they do not go to all this trouble, but merely split the end of the cane for a yard or so and tie a stick across; standing on this the man is lowered.

372
222 The ladder having been completed, the *kullas* or torches and the *matha* or forked stake are yet to make. The torches, four of which are required, are designed to give a maximum of smoke, and are therefore constructed by enclosing dry *mana* grass, leaves and bark within a sheath of green leafy twigs. The *matha* or *masleya* is a stake six feet long, made of the light *velang* or *walumala*; it is pointed at one end and forked at the other by being split cross-wise into four pointed prongs which are kept apart by two pieces of stick wedged in cross-wise and tied. Both *matha* and *kulas* have long loose loops attached to them by which they are slung to the arms when not in use.

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*"*Pana epa biyath wala bahinay; amma thatha epa biyala.*"

Lastly, there is the *hangotema* (deer-skin receptacle for the honey), 222 or *yakka-katia* (devil's mouth) as it is reverently called out of deference 415 to the tutelary demons of the rock, who might otherwise be angered 776 and send the cutter to his doom.

A pile of firewood is now collected on top of the rock to protect the 222 guardians of the ladder, while another heap is made by those below. All being ready they await the protecting darkness. When this comes the play begins. The great fire at the foot of the rock is lit and fed [372] abundantly with green leaves; large volumes of smoke lick uncannily up the side of the hill towards the hives; now there is a stir among the bees. As the Veddas hear it their merriment waxes great: "*Bambaru, bambaru, bambaru; thapita, thapita, thapita. Ho bambaru thuape**;" they cry. "*Giddi, giddi, giddi; rung, rung, rung,*" they jeer in imitation of the flight.

Meanwhile the fire above has been lighted, and two smoking *hulas* have been lowered towards the hives. The air is heavy with the ominous hum of angry bees.

Now is the time for the descent. The ladder, firmly secured to a tree [587] or stone, and guarded by the brother-in-law of the cutter (the only person ineligible to marry his wife in the event of accident), is let down with a [607] propitiatory incantation* to the demons of the rock and ancestral spirits. [782] This being uttered, the hand grip is said to be strong and the feet to cling like jak milk to the stone.

With smoking *hulas* looped to forearms and *matha* slung on shoulder, and hair dishevelled over his face that the bees may not get at his eyes and nose, the cutter, gripping the cane with a single hand, disappears over the edge of the cliff into the darkness and the smoke. The ladder creaks as he feels his way down, for he sees nothing.

He has reached the level of the hives. At a signal the deer-skin receptacle is lowered to him, and this he secures to the ladder. Thrusting a leg between two rungs so that his foot is on the lower and his bent knee against the upper, and his head between two others so that the back of his neck is braced against a rung, he is free to use his hands. First he smokes the hives with the *hulas* mounted on the *matha* and drives away the lingering bees. Then, slinging the *hulas* on his forearms, he [412] takes up the stake and, with its pointed end, cuts horizontally through the lower part of the comb, separating off the useless *yotha* with its contained grubs which the bees stoutly defend. He next cuts the comb in vertical sections, and, loosening each from its attachment, spits it with the pronged end of the stake, removes it, and shakes it into the receptacle at his knee. Thus he deals with all the hives.

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*"The bees, the bees, the bees; pile the fire, pile the fire, pile the fire. Ho! the bees run."

†*Yathinawa* it is called; and thus it goes:—

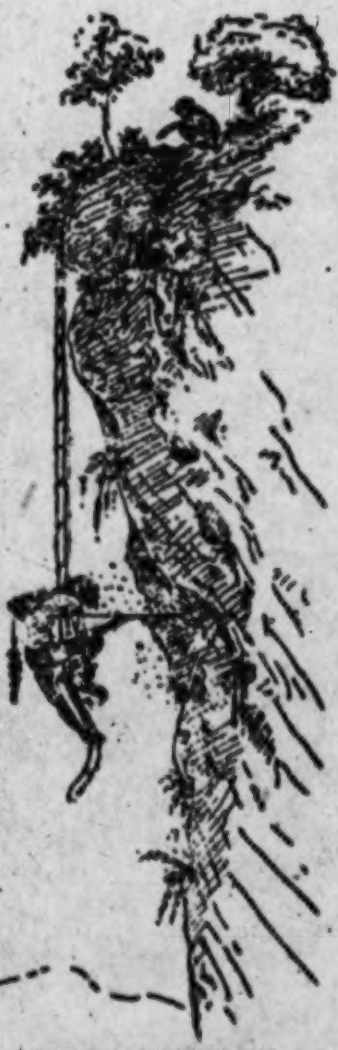
Haiboa, haiboa, haiboa.
Ma ninithagang kotuahoe marikchee,
Alut upang nanunthangia maihi kalaney.
Maihi ural opuhoru thenauwa kitkon,
Hamuthoyan santhaum opuaragana karunahagroo.
The badey yanna, the badey yanna, the badey yanna.

222 [533: 152]

And as he works he sings the cutter's song* and many a vulgar song besides. For this is the epic event of the Vedda's life, and never is he so happy as when engaged in the perilous work. Wild is the jungle night and the rocks around re-echo to his song.

When the "devil's mouth" is full, he releases it from the ladder and shouts "*adapo*" (lift) to those above; they pull on the attached rope. With a series of short jerks, the cutter climbing and helping from below, the honey is lifted. As each pull brings the vessel to the level of the cutter's head he calls out "*ho-ho*," and the hauling is stopped; then, climbing a rung or two he gives a helping hand and cries "*adapo*" again. And so, with "*adapo*...... *ho-ho*" following each other in quick succession, the precious freight is safely hauled over the edge of the cliff. It may be that the cutter has to descend to his work again. With the last load he climbs over the top, a figure to behold—sweating, exhausted, honey-bedaubed, bereft of all the stamina that has sustained him so long. He throws himself down. Nor have all his arts availed him against the bees, for he is covered with stings. Solicitously his wife and a friend or two group round him, and with pitying words pick off the stings. But, impatient of this, he besmears himself with sand that the ants may not worry him, and is soon asleep.

Such is the story behind the potful of *bambara* honey the Vedda offers for a trifle of grain or a fragment of cloth.



[439]

The honey-gatherer at work

**Bavri, bavri, bavri, bavri,*
Bavri, bavri, bavri, bavri.
Ama, ama,
Aramaya, aramaya, aramaya, aramaya,
Thalung badamaga adung padang kathai keyya
Ennla barula palang ando kantbulung
Gayang thagana panna
Alutha Vanniya!

Sinhalese AX4

CHAPTER VII

BINTENNE

THE pass at Kadugannawa was thronged with bartering humanity. Being ouo
Sunday, it was market day, and the occasion served well to help us lay in a good stock of tobacco and betel, the best passport to the wild interior.

On through Teldeniya, whose cocoa plantations teem with snails that V
struggle over the road to explode under our car-wheels, and then, after 133
Urugalla, we climb the Nugatenne gap and, skirting the Dumbara valley, attain beautiful wind-swept Madugoda. So far among the hills. From here it is a sudden drop to the Mahaweli and the wilderness beyond. We have left Madugoda but a little way when, at a turn, there suddenly opens before us a magic sea of misty greenery broken by hill ranges; there stand many blue mountains we know, Kokagalla, the dancing rock of the Veddas, and Friar's Hood faint and far; and there gleam a river and a tank; the former the Mahaweli, the latter placid Horabora Wewa traditional lake of Vedda lands.

The descent from the hills here is perhaps the most precipitous in all Ceylon; we drop some two thousand feet, and negotiate eighteen elbow bends within four miles; then, skirting the base of the mountain we come to the ferry of Weragantota and cross the Mahaweli in canoes to Alutnuwara, a fever-stricken place; whoever sojourns here even a few days invariably pays the penalty.

A quaint old town is Alutnuwara, or Bintenne as the jungle dwellers V
call it. Cosy homes and boutiques nestle under shady trees. Chained 103
monkeys and caged parrots are ubiquitous and may be purchased for a
song. Laden *tavalam* teams rest here on their way to the interior. It 136
being April, every tree has its nesting bird—bee-catchers, bulbuls, drongos, coppersmiths and all the rest of them; hungry little squirrels cheep spasmodically for food; song fills the air.

Scattered about the place one is surprised to find old cannon. Those S
who see them for the first time frame visions of an era when ancient 174
Sinhalese kings built these in foundries, and fed them with powder made from sulphur and nitre available in the neighbouring hills. But we may safely assume that firearms were unknown in Ceylon prior to the coming of the Portuguese. What then is the story of these brave things that lie in a ditch here, set off a doorway there? They were brought here, according to some, from the East coast by the English in their attempts to take Kandy; but finding the mountain barrier impassable they abandoned them here. The more likely explanation, however, is that they are a survival of the time when Alutnuwara was a military station after the Kandyan rebellion of 1817, "the last great occasion on which the English forces were arrayed in hostility against the natives of any portion of Ceylon."* To prevent a repetition of rebellion, a

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*Emerson Tennent.

[p 91]

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S: Spittel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AXS Vedda

Sinhalese AX4

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Cannon once—gate-posts now. (Page 91)

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Mahiyangana-dagaba. (Page 91)

[facing p. 92]

174 Negro detachment under an English subaltern is said to have been posted at Alutnuwara. It was not long before the subaltern died. The remnant of soldiery, now leaderless, took the law into their own hands and terrorised the district. Housed in their barracks, which stood on the old hospital premises, they molested women on their way to and from the river. Eventually the villagers surrounded them and forced them to a surrender, the terms of which, everything considered, were not unfavourable to the Negroes; for they were allowed to settle peaceably in a village on the opposite bank of the river, where, to this day, the people are said to speak with a drawl reminiscent of certain African tribes.*

778 Alutnuwara is by no means the insignificant place it would appear on a casual visit. It is a very ancient and sacred town; and, at one season
788 of the year, is the goal of multitudes of pilgrims who come thither on foot from all parts of Ceylon, descending the flanking hill—Galpadihela—, not by the present motorable road, but by the steep pilgrim path paved with two thousand steps of stone. The little dagaba here, the Mahayan-
173 gana, now in ruins, is said not only to be the oldest in Ceylon, but also to mark the very site where Buddha sat when he first came to the Island
773 and preached to his followers, having driven away the Yakkhas as the original inhabitants were called.

Thus the Mahawansa†:—

"The Conqueror‡ in the ninth month of his Buddhahood himself set forth for the isle of Lanka (Ceylon) to win Lanka for the faith. For Lanka was known to the Conqueror as a place where his doctrine should shine in glory; and from Lanka filled with Yakkhas, the Yakkhas must be driven forth.

And he knew also that in the midst of Lanka, on the fair river bank, in the delightful Mahanaga garden, the meeting place for the Yakkhas, there was a great gathering of all the Yakkhas dwelling in the island. To this great gathering went the Blessed One and there, hovering in the air over their heads, at the place of future Mahiyangana-thupa, he struck terror to their hearts by rain, storm, darkness and so forth. The Yakkhas, overwhelmed by fear, besought the fearless Vanquisher to release them from terrors, and the Vanquisher spoke thus to the terrified Yakkhas: 'I will banish this your fear and your distress, O Yakkhas, give ye here to me with one accord a place where I may sit down.' The Yakkhas thus answered the Blessed One: 'We all, O Lord, give you the whole of our island. Give us release from our fear.' Then, when he had destroyed their terror, and had spread his rug of skin on the ground that they bestowed on him, the Conqueror, sitting there, made the rug to spread wide while burning flame surrounded it. Daunted by the burning heat thereof

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*I am indebted to Dr. A. Nell for this information.

†Ancient Ceylonese chronicle, of the trustworthiness of which Geiger the translator says, "The presentation of the subject, taken as a whole, may be called modest and simple, indeed dry. True there is no lack of fables and marvellous tales. But they appear as outward decoration which can easily be omitted. The ornament with which tradition decks out the victory of the true faith enfolds a deeper meaning. The facts in themselves are extraordinarily simple; but to the pious sentiment of the believer they seemed great; and fantasy glorifies them with the many coloured lights of miracle and legend."

Professor Rhys Davis lays stress on the fact that these chronicles contain no pure history, but represent the traditions of their time.

‡Buddha, born 563 B.C., died 483 B.C., lived 80 years.

5: Spinel D-5 (ca. 1920) 1945 AX5 Vedda AX5

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[Facing p.93]

Veddas of Bulugahadena. (Page 93)

Veddas of Bulugahadena. (Page 93)

and terrified they stood around the border. Then did the Saviour cause S
the pleasant Giridipa (Highlands) to come here near to them, and when 173
they had settled there, he made it return to its former place. Then did 773
the Saviour fold his rug of skin; the devas assembled, and in their assembly the Master preached them the doctrine. The conversion of many kotis of living beings took place and countless were those who came into the precepts of duty. The prince of the devas craved of him something to worship. The Conqueror, who had pure and blue black locks, passing his hand over his head, bestowed on him a handful of hairs. And he, receiving this in a splendid golden urn, when he had laid the hairs on a heap of many coloured gems, seven cubits round, piled up at the place where the Master had sat, covered them over with the thupa of sapphire and worshipped them.

"When Sambuddha had died, the thera Sarabhu, by his miraculous power, received, even from the funeral pyre, the collar bone of the Conqueror and brought it to Lanka and laid it in that same cetiya.

"The king Dutthagamini, dwelling there while he made war upon S
the Damilas (Tamils) built a mantle cetiya over it eighty cubits high. [778]
Thus was the Mahiyangana-thupa completed."

Barely four miles from Alutnuwara is the beautiful tank of Horabora V
Wewa whose vast waters have been cunningly trapped by a great earth 136
work or bund, amidst a natural barrier of surrounding hills. As one 312
sits here of an evening and looks across with field-glasses to the wilder opposite shore, small herds of deer may be seen feeding on the grassy edge between forest and lake; and in the drought, herds of elephants come to the water. White cranes fly overhead to roost on the bordering
trees at dusk. Placed as it is in the heart of the Vedda country, this V
tank has long been associated with the Veddas. To-day only a few 361
very destitute families of half-Veddas are to be found at Malgoda on the 262
borders of the tank, living in the crudest of shelters, and feeding for the most part on the seeds of lotus pods (*olu*).

By an ancient sluice cut out of stone,* the tank-water is conducted S
along a channel to a wide stretch of paddy fields, now mostly in disuse V
owing to the paucity of the population. This brimming waterway,
its grassy banks studded with beautiful trees, affords many a delightful 312
picture, especially where the lotus thrives with its large, snow-white [773]
blossoms and no less beautiful leaves be-diamonded with sparkling droplets of water. Here halcyons fish all day. Up to recent years the tank itself was covered with lotus; but now, for some reason or other, there is none; and when no breeze stirs the glassy waters at midday, they reflect an ever changing panorama of dazzling clouds only broken where a darter or cormorant gambols.

It is not surprising that so beautiful a tank should have inspired a fine S
poem, of which I have attempted a poor translation that does scant justice 538
to the euphonious idioms, the long vowel cadences, the alliterations, and rhymes of the Sinhalese original.

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*Tradition has it that two giants (*yodhayas*) sat here on opposite sides of a crack in the great rock, and each, seizing that part on which he was seated with his hands, and thrusting with his feet against the other, wrenched the rocks apart, making an outlet for the water!

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Veddas of Dambana. (Page 95)

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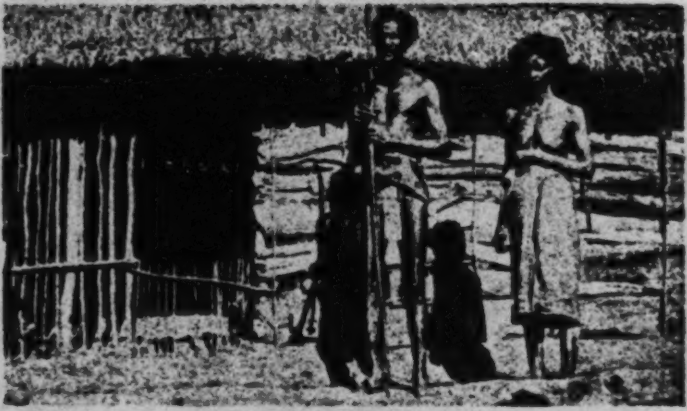

Veddas of Dambana. (Page 95)

[Facing p. 94]

S 538 Wild are the wastes that surround Sorabora Wewa. Through a channel of cut stones her waters feed the fields. To the temple of Bintenne her lotus blooms are borne. Eyes that have not beheld her, can they worship truly?

On Na-nithula trees the white cranes brood in sleep: their bills not with silver but rich gold gleaming; their plumes, though not gay with colour, are bright with a satin sheen. The cranes of Sorabora that move in the sedge.

In Sorabora Wewa fine *olu*[*] clusters grow. To gather these come women fair and lovely. They will roast them red and black and set them before us; but, alas! to eat with the *olu* rice, we have no meat.

Deep under the water the good yams lie; on the surface above, the leaves swing lightly round. The flowers unfold to the dew and the rain—pearl-studded shades for the fishes below.

S 173 773 The dagaba, the tank and the pilgrim path are associated in legend:—Dutthagamani (101—77 B.C.), the most renowned of Sinhalese kings, lived at one time at Mahanuwara, as Alutnuwara was then called[†]. Being as devout as he was brave, he set about to complete the Mahiyangana-thupa or dagaba. In those days there were giants or *yodhayas*; and Dutthagamani had under him one conspicuous *yodhaya* named Bullatha whose daily duty it was to milk a cow at Kiripatiya across the mountains, and to make for the king thirty chews of betel, one for each hour of the Sinhalese day. In addition to these appointed tasks, he contrived to carry out clandestinely two other works which were to win him great merit and incidentally death. For, on his way back from Kiripatiya, laden with milk for the king, he brought each day a great stone which he laid down on the steep mountain side, and so constructed the steps (*gal-padi*) of the pilgrim path; hence is the hill called Galpadihela. He also found time to pile up the great bund of Horabora Wewa, digging up a few shovelfuls of earth each day. The work being completed he threw his spade into the tank.

Works of this magnitude could not long be kept secret; and soon it reached the ears of the king that his *yodhaya* had constructed a vast tank. Dutthagamani, who in the meanwhile had completed the Mahiyangana dagaba, visited Horabora Wewa, and when he saw it, recognised at once that here was the more virtuous accomplishment, being a greater boon to the poor people.

"Give me," he said to the *yodhaya*, "the merit that is yours for the building of this tank; and I will give you that which is mine for restoring the dagaba."

Bullatha refused. He was killed and his body thrown into the tank. Then the waters blossomed; from his head sprang the *olu* (head) flowers, from his eyes the lotus fruit, and from his limbs the lotus stalks.

V 131 Bintenne, as all this country is called, has always been the home of Veddas. "Worse than a Vedda of Bintenne," is a term of opprobrium common even to-day. Were the present Veddas of Bintenne any wilder than those we had already seen? We suspected, not; for a glance at the map showed this country to be better supplied with bridle-paths than most of the jungles we had already explored.

We had not gone many miles from Alutnuwara before our eyes convinced us that even among those avowedly Sinhalese there was much

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[*] *Nymphaea lotus* or water lily; the roots, stalks, yams, fruit, and seeds are all eaten. And so are those of the large-flowered lotus *Nelumbium speciosum*—sacred bean.

[†] The present rest-house is said to mark the site of his palace.

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The finest Vedda we saw in Bintenne. (Page 95)

[facing p.95]

interfusion of Vedda blood—the apathetic look, the scanty beard, were 131
unmistakably there. The area we had to traverse was not extensive,
hemmed in, as it was, by the Bibile-Maha Oya road on the one hand and
Mahaweli on the other. It is five miles from Alutnuwara to Arawatta;
six miles from that to the Ulhitiya Oya; thence seven to Beligalla which
is within four to six miles of Bulugahadena and Dambana, the Vedda
haunts of to-day. The going is through forest comparatively well peopled;
and *chenas* are frequently met with; changing from year to year, these
often absorb the path and obliterate it, causing deviations which lead
astray even guides conversant with the country a few months previously.

We were nearing Bulugahadena when we met our first Vedda of these 101
parts—a tall, picturesque fellow with ear-rings, shouldering his bow [301]
stave with a small gourdful of honey slung on its end. Unspoilt, reserved
and natural, in contrast to his fellows whom we afterwards met, he was [157]
the finest Vedda we saw in Bintenne.

In an environment, not of virgin forest, but of derelict *chenas* we found [361]
the Veddas of Bulugahadena. They lived scattered about, a hut or two
to each *chena*, and not in groups as one so often sees; the explanation
we were given for this was not the obvious one that *chenas* were apparently [626
easier of acquisition here than elsewhere, but that it served to keep
the families apart and prevent social entanglements, Veddas being very 152]
jealous of their women.

There was no reserve about these people. As we approached each 576
hut, the men, armed with axes, bows and arrows, came out and greeted
us vociferously in the Vedda language; Sinhalese they affected not to [411]
know. Their women were mostly sullen and silent; but one at least gave
us a better reception than her husband did. Here and there a sickly
wretch craved for medicine.

Their huts, made of bark slats and wattle, were too well built for 342
Vedda habitations; they had not that crudity and unkemptness so
characteristic of the huts of the wilder Veddas, and most of them were
finished off with a neat fence-work. There was no lack of *kurrakkan* [241]
and maize here; and on the whole they seemed a fairly prosperous and
contented community.

The Veddas of Dambana, who lived four miles away, were much the 101
same as those of Bulugahadena; and so were the others we met scattered
about these jungles. One lot we found picturesquely grouped in a 361
rock-shelter, reproducing to perfection the old cave life; but they were
obviously there for our benefit!

Of these Veddas, considered as a whole, we may say that we had never 161
before seen so many of them as on this short trip of barely a week. On
previous journeys, after having traversed miles and miles of jungle, we
had met only a Vedda here and a Vedda there, never more than a dozen
in all, often but one or two. But in Bintenne we saw no less than about
fifty good specimens. Though they were obviously sophisticated by 177
their nearness to Badulla and the many occasions on which their
representatives had been on show, Vedda blood is still strong in Bintenne.
This is the place to come to if one wishes to pick up the few words that
are left of the Vedda language, and the art of making bows and arrows;
but apart from that, these people are too civilised to be interesting.

One episode we experienced here is worth recalling. Two Veddas, 224
better disposed towards us than the rest, one with his lip all askew from

224 a bear-bite, came one afternoon with two dogs and suggested a monitor hunt.

After having walked aimlessly through the jungle for the better part of an hour, we got impatient, and asked the Veddas what manner of hunt was this, and of what breed were their useless mongrels? They replied, and with justice, that the jungle was none of their choosing, and that there were no goas about for their dogs to scent them, as any one could see from the lack of traces. Once within the jungle, we had expected the dogs to shake off their lethargy and nose about at every scent. Not so these beasts, they hung on the heels of their masters, the least enthusiastic of the company. However, our remarks put the men on their mettle and, walking ahead, they tried to set their dogs to; one of them actually whistling and snapping his fingers after the manner of us in towns!

We had given up all hope of even seeing a monitor when suddenly there was a rustle in front of us, and a Vedda and his dog shot forward. We followed to find the Vedda gazing helplessly at a hole high up in the trunk of a tall tree, and his cur, its enthusiasm already wilted, lying contentedly with closed eyes, as if nothing was further from his thoughts than lizards in general and this one in particular.

224
313 The tree up which the reptile had sought refuge was quite four feet in diameter. The Vedda was not long in doubt as to how he should act. Walking round the tree he tapped it with the head of his axe, and, finding it reasonably hollow, what should he do but proceed to fell it with that toy axe of his the cutting edge of which was no more than one and a half inches! So astonished were we at this that we settled down to a smoke, and watched.

After almost two hours of arduous toil, the great tree groaned and bore slowly down through thwarting lianas and the boughs of its huddled neighbours. It hesitated in its fall and then, despite ominous cracklings, remained poised aslant. A half hour more, and a supporting tree of no small girth was sacrificed with many an obscene curse; then another, and another tree; and finally the giant fell.

But what of the monitor? There was not the least sign of him. The dogs, roused to expectation by the falling tree, had already resumed their repose. The Veddas, to their chagrin, discovered by tapping the trunk that its whole length was hollow. They hewed an opening into it some feet away from the entrance hole; and then with long sticks vainly tried to poke the reptile out. Two more windows were made, and much more progging done before, with the onset of dark, the project was abandoned as hopeless. "Why not have smoked the animal out?" you will ask; we did suggest it, only to learn that, while it would answer for the pangolin, it was useless for the monitor which tenacious creature will rather die suffocated in its lair than emerge to fall a victim to axe or canine jaw. That little beast certainly had the laugh of us!

This incident demonstrates well how wasteful of forest vegetation Veddas are. Often one sees great trees—even satin or ebony—felled across the path, only to find on inspecting them that they were sacrificed for a parrot's nest or a honey-comb! Be the crime what it may in the eyes of the law, it required a demonstration such as this to inspire us with respect for the toy-like axe the Vedda carries on his shoulder, and the stamina of his stringy arm.

[pp. 97-110 not processed]